

Mister Chair, Dear colleagues

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share with you some of our experiences in the area of development assistance within the framework of interparliamentary cooperation – an area to which I believe most of us are in one way or another deeply committed.

Since the 1990s, the Riksdag has been engaged in promoting democracy and transparency in other parliaments. Our engagement has changed over time and after nearly two decades of different kinds of assistance or cooperation, I would say we have now gathered a considerable amount of valuable experience that is well worth sharing.

One example of this, or one lesson we have learnt if you like, is that we should be as concrete and practical as possible. When we engage in parliamentary cooperation, we ask ourselves: what is the purpose of the cooperation? What do our counterparts expect from all these efforts? What do we ourselves expect? How do we go about achieving the goals we have set? In my experience, the more to the point we are, the more likely it is that the cooperation will result in success.

It is also important to keep in mind the political context of the parliament we are cooperating with. Every country and every parliament is unique, with its own unique historical and political experiences. What is the political culture like in the country or parliament we are cooperating with?

Another way of making the cooperation smoother might be to coordinate it with other ongoing projects. Maybe your own country has some foreign aid projects there, or perhaps there is an EU project. And if those projects are no longer up

and running, maybe there are still people who can tell you how they worked and give you good suggestions of what to do and what not to do.

One more lesson that at least we in the Swedish Parliament have learned: You do not have to start from scratch every time. We make a careful note of who to contact within our own organization, what works well and what does not work so well, which MPs to contact and so on. This is especially true if we keep to our agenda and try to concentrate on the experiences that are worth sharing. So if a programme works – we use it again. No one – or at least very few people – will notice.

In 2011, the Swedish Parliament introduced a strategy for international development cooperation. The aim was to strengthen democratic institutions through support from parliament to parliament in a one-year project. The Board of the Swedish Parliament decided which country to choose and every political party in the Parliament had the opportunity to nominate one of their MPs to run the project. The general idea was to focus on countries in the vicinity of the EU. This is one of the reasons why Moldova was the first country to be chosen back in 2012. One year later, we engaged in cooperation with the parliament of Georgia.

One conclusion from these two exchanges was that they were both demanding in terms of resources. The projects were time-consuming and it was also challenging to find the right connections and our knowledge of the political context in these countries was, at least initially, limited. Financially, it also presented a burden for the Riksdag. In 2014, it was decided that the one-year cooperation programmes would be brought to an end. The political parties' own international democracy-building projects, the Interparliamentary Union and, not least, the EU were considered sufficient for more long-term cooperation.

Instead, the Riksdag set out to engage with other parliaments much more on an *ad hoc*-basis. Since our International Department receives many delegations from parliaments all over the world each year, some of these visits have developed into cooperation in one way or another. I would like to mention a couple of recent examples:

One year ago, the Speaker of the Albanian parliament visited Sweden. The visit resulted in an agreement between the two parliamentary administrations to start a cooperation project at the civil servant level. Questions such as transparency and the general public's access to official records, IT solutions and the library service were among the topics discussed. In June last year, a delegation of around ten Albanian civil servants came to Stockholm for three days and just last month, in January, a delegation from the Riksdag Administration visited the Albanian parliament in Tirana.

We have had similar cooperation previously with the Ukrainian parliament and of course also extend a continuous welcome to other parliaments if they feel that we have something to offer.

Nowadays, this form of cooperation always takes place on the initiative of the visiting parliament. It must also have a clear purpose and clear goals. The Riksdag is the host, organizes the programmes, and pays for some meals, while the visiting delegation pays for their travel and their accommodation. The idea behind this is that if the visiting parliament pays for a large part of the visit, it serves as proof that they are also committed.

Apart from Albania and Ukraine, this past year we have been cooperating to a lesser or larger extent with parliaments from such countries as Bosnia-

Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, Tunisia, Brazil, Indonesia, Kenya, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia and Montenegro.

Although some of the cooperation has been between civil servants in the parliaments, the vast majority has of course been between MPs. This last year we have had many visiting MPs eager to learn more about Swedish policy on migration, the labour market, gender equality or the welfare system as a whole, to mention just a few of the topics that have been discussed.

That was a short introduction to how our international parliamentary cooperation has developed over the years. I would be very interested to hear about your own experiences. I am convinced that we can learn a lot from one another.