

## ***Sweden have now – for the first time – a minister responsible for Public Procurement***

Interview with Arddalan  
Schekarabi, Minister of Public  
Administration



Question: First – a few words of your background personally and in the subject matter.

Answer; Born 1978 in UK (Manchester) raised in Teheran – Iran – come to Sweden as refugee at the age of 11.

PhD student at Uppsala University – in law with Public Procurement as special area.

Worked at the university and in the administration at the ministry of justice.

MP of Sweden for four years.

Q: At the installation of the new government the Prime minister said explicitly that your responsibility was “the important area of Public Procurement” how come?

A: The Prime minister has declared that Public Procurement is part of the new government strategies.

It’s an honour to have been appointed to fulfil these expectations. We will formulate a national strategy and combined it with strategies on local government level.

As responsible minister I do not only have full support of the prime minister but also high demands.

Q: Then – please describe your intention – how to use the public procurement – “to create a better society”.

A: Public Procurement in Sweden exceeds 60 billion euro which is a considerable part of the total GDP (approx. 20 %?). Contracting authorities are e.g. purchasing elderly care (approx. 20 % of the total production), equipment to hospitals, meals to children and elderly in municipal care and schools, textbooks for educational purposes, public transport etc. Hence, public procurement (PP) in Sweden is often concerned with the core of the welfare. And public procurement does literally play an important role in building the society (rails, schools, hospitals, public housing etc.).

A well performed public procurement and contract management could make a substantive difference when it comes to quality in public services, incl. public buildings. Using social and

environmental criteria/taking social/environmental considerations in public procurement is another way to contribute to a sustainable and better society. A third way to create a better society is to use the potential in public procurement to enhance innovation and new solutions that have the potential to improve the public sector as well as society as a whole.

Q: More direct – what goals and results do you expect from a better usage of public procurement as a tool.

A: The government has so far proposed a new goal for the public procurement policy in the budget bill for 2015

**“Public procurement is to be effective, legally secure and make use of the competition in the market while promoting innovative solutions as well as taking environmental and social concerns into account. Hence public procurement will contribute to well-functioning community service for the benefit of citizens and business development while tax revenues are made the most of.”**

The government intend, during the year to come, to develop this overarching goal for public procurement into a strategy for the Swedish public procurement. The intention is to develop the strategy in close co-operation with municipalities and county councils that stands for approx. 2/3 of the public procurement.

Q: Can public procurement become in line with private purchasing when it comes to be used to reach the overall goals?

A: Public procurement could never be similar to private purchasing but we could certainly learn from each other. This is partly due to the public procurement regulation that closely regulates the procedure and the dealings between the contracting authorities and the economic operators. Partly it is also because government agencies and local authorities have other missions than private companies. They are responsible to execute public policy; perform services of general interest and uphold important institutions in society. Public procurement is in this respect a very useful tool and its potential has not been fully utilized.

Q: What are the obstacles and challenges to reach a more strategic and professional handling of public procurement.

A: There are excellent examples of strategic contracting authorities with highly competent and professional staff that could be displayed as good examples. There are also contracting authorities struggling with public procurement and having a hard time to allocate the necessary resources. Sweden could also do more in order to lift the public procurement issues to top level on the agenda of contracting authorities in order to show how powerful tool we are dealing with. Public procurement support authority will play an important role as will different forms of joint procurement.

Q: In some media the “Enterprise society” has declared that they are afraid of that demand on fair trade etc. will minimize or limit competition – your comment on that:

A: We will support free and open competition. We will try to make it easier to comply with requirements in the fair trade and environmental as well as any other area. A well functional market

and functional competition is an important component to achieve good results for public procurement.

Q: To achieve environmental and social goals – is the use of “Marking systems” that already exists a good way forward? (Fair Trade – EU Ecolabel, etc.) Can that help minimize the problem with documentation to comply?

A: Yes exactly and that is the intention in the new EU-directives and we intend to implement those as open as possible.

Q: Is competence among civil servants and the buying organisation an obstacle? Do you think a “Strategic level Certification” should be required – or at least supported?

A: Yes, I believe that the Purchasers are critical in achieving the intended. The Purchasers must be located in a strategic level to be able to drive strategies. To upgrade the competence of Purchasers to the strategic level is a key issue to reach a change in the public sector thinking of the role of public procurement.

The new authority “Public Procurement support” will have the responsibility to raise the view on public procurement not only among the purchaser but even more important among the administration in general and responsible politicians especially.

By

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