



PERMANENT DELEGATION OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE

STATEMENT BY NORWAY

As delivered by Ambassador Guttorm Vik
to the OSCE Review Conference,
Warsaw, 1 October 2010
Session 1: Democratic institutions

Mr. Moderator,

Free and fair elections, following an electoral campaign with equal opportunities for all contenders to present their candidacies, remain the cornerstone of any true democracy. Unfortunately, we still see far too many examples where agreed standards are not adhered to, with dubious legitimacy for the declared winner as a result. And even in so-called mature democracies, we usually have some features in our election systems that may seem odd to outsiders and that are rooted in tradition rather than the requirements of modern societies.

A supreme tool for improving shortcomings is to be found in international election observation. Here we can be justly proud of OSCE's contribution to the world. The main reason why our OSCE observation findings are held in such high regard and enjoy such high credibility internationally is the long term observation methods developed by ODIHR, which consist in observing **before, during and after** the elections. Particularly the "before" is sometimes more important than "during". Credibility is much easier lost than won, and it is of utmost importance that the impartiality and integrity of ODIHR's Election Observation Missions can be fully maintained. Let me stress that there can be no question of relegating ODIHR to a subordinate position in relation to other partners in election observation. As we have seen on innumerable occasions, observation missions are at their best when based on a truly cooperative partnership between the participating institutions, allowing the observation effort to benefit fully from the respective strengths of the various participants. Let me add that this partnership should also be extended to observers from organizations like the Council of Europe and the European Parliament.

The thorough, balanced and well documented report issued by ODIHR a couple of months after an election observation mission offers an excellent tool for the host government to identify shortcomings and conduct a thorough evaluation of how electoral systems can be improved for

the next occasion. The overwhelmingly largest scope for improvement in this vital area for democracy lies clearly in improved follow-up by the participating States. Unfortunately, the failure to live up to the commitment undertaken in Istanbul in 1999 to “follow up promptly the OSCE/ODIHR’s election assessment and recommendations” is the rule rather than the exception.

Accordingly, there is a strong need to implement the proposals for improved and much more systematic follow-up contained in a food for thought paper launched by Romania in the Corfu process, together with Norway and a number of other co-sponsors, which was just presented by the Romanian representative.

We have recently endeavored to show by example how this can be done. After the Parliamentary elections last fall, which were generally found to be conducted in a very satisfactory manner, ODIHR issued a thorough Election Assessment Mission report, which constituted an important part in the regular follow-up and improvement exercise conducted after each election by the electoral authorities in Norway, this time in close cooperation with ODIHR. We also reported fully on this follow-up to the Human Dimension Committee, to the Permanent Council and to the Anniversary Conference in Copenhagen, thus allowing for a peer review of our follow-up. This reporting exercise is well documented on the OSCE websites, with links to the websites of the Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. I was pleased to note the interest and support for our effort expressed by previous speakers, notably the UK and Canada.

Reporting and peer reviews are among the best tools to ensure that the commitments undertaken in relation to elections are followed up. Even the best election systems can be further improved, so we all have something to learn. We strongly recommend that all countries that have benefitted from election observation should report to the competent OSCE bodies and be ready to answer questions and comments. We also recommend that regular procedures should be established for such exercises, as part of the improved follow-up to be agreed at the summit meeting in Astana.

Thank you for your attention.