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**PERMANENT DELEGATION
OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE**

STATEMENT ON THE SITUATION IN BELARUS

As delivered by Ambassador Guttorm Vik
to the Permanent Council,
Vienna, 3 February, 2011

Mr. Chairperson,

Let me first state that Norway associates itself fully with the conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council of the EU of 31 January, as just presented by the distinguished representative of Hungary.

Allow me also to share with you the main contents of a press release issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs yesterday, including some quotes from our Foreign Minister, Mr. Jonas Gahr Støre, on the situation in Belarus:

“The situation in Belarus after the protests following the presidential election is still giving cause for deep concern. We call for the immediate release of political prisoners. Norway intends to respond by introducing targeted sanctions, as the EU and US have done. We will strengthen our support for groups who are working for democracy and human rights”.

Like the EU, Norway intends to introduce travel bans and a freeze on assets targeting Belarusian officials who have been involved in electoral fraud or in the brutal repression of demonstrations after the presidential election.

“We do not wish to target the Belarusian people. On the contrary, we will increase our support for civil society and students in Belarus.”

Norway will increase support for project cooperation with Belarus from NOK 15 million in 2010 to NOK 20 million in 2011. Norway will continue to support Belarusian civil society through project cooperation involving Norwegian NGOs.

Norway has also announced a new contribution to the European Humanities University (EHU), which was closed by the Belarusian authorities in 2004 and has re-located to Vilnius. This is the only Belarusian university that is committed to academic freedom and encourages students to think creatively and critically.

“It is vitally important that Belarusian students are given the opportunity to develop such skills, which are of fundamental importance in a democratic society. Norway will therefore provide a grant of NOK 6 million to the university over a two-year period. In addition, we will contribute NOK 600 000 to an emergency fund for students who are excluded from universities in Belarus, so that they can complete their studies at the EHU.”

Minister of Research and Higher Education Tora Aasland has taken the initiative for a joint letter from education ministers in seven European countries to their colleague in Belarus. In their letter, they express their concern about the situation for students and academic staff who took part in the protests after the presidential election, and about the lack of academic freedom in Belarus”.

I thank you, Mr. Chairperson.