

STATEMENT BY NORWEGIAN DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER
MS. ELISABETH WALAAS
AT THE SEVENTEENTH MEETING OF THE OSCE
MINISTERIAL COUNCIL, ATHENS, 1–2 DECEMBER 2009

Mr Chairman,

Allow me to commend you and your team for your untiring efforts and many achievements at the helm of the OSCE in 2009. You have worked efficiently to restore confidence and trust between the participating States and to revitalise the OSCE as an arena for genuine dialogue on common security challenges.

Through the Corfu process we have engaged in a systematic assessment of our cooperation and the level of implementation in all three dimensions. We have looked at our mechanisms for conflict prevention and resolution. We have scrutinized our common challenges and threats. The process has already had a positive impact, and we in particular value the level of common purpose when it comes to new transnational threats and challenges, and challenges in the economic and environmental dimension.

Norway believes that the OSCE's comprehensive concept of security is fundamental to the continued security in the OSCE area. Full implementation of all obligations in all three dimensions is paramount. We must bear in mind that genuine security both among and within states is only sustainable when there is security for the individual that is founded on democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights.

Mr Chairman,

It is now time to decide on the next stage of this broad dialogue. We will need in-depth reviews and concrete discussions on specific areas identified so far. Allow me to mention three issues to be included in this process:

Firstly, the treatment of national minorities. At first glance, this looks like a human rights issue. But if we take a look at the past and present conflicts in our region, we find that the treatment of national minorities have played a prominent role in most of them. Accordingly, in order to eliminate the root causes of potential conflicts, the rights of national minorities must be fully respected in their countries of residence, and both home states and kin states must fully abide by the High Commissioner's Bolzano/Bozen recommendations on how to treat national minorities in inter-state relations. Norway fully shares the High Commissioner's view that these recommendations would be even more useful if they were endorsed by governments, thus becoming politically binding.

Secondly, we need to refine the OSCE tool box and update and adapt our tools in order to be effective in conflict prevention and equipped to meet new threats and challenges. We need to

examine why agreed mechanisms have remained dormant, even when security challenges have required activation, especially in the field of mediation.

Thirdly, Norway agrees with the proposal to conduct a review or assessment of the Vienna Document, with the aim to identify areas that are obsolete and in need of a technical update. This should be one of the first tasks undertaken next year, in the hope that early progress could provide a boost to our efforts in other areas, notably the all-important task of getting the CFE regime back on track.

In continuing our discussions, we should guard the achievements made in the human dimension. Free and fair elections, freedom of the media, a vibrant civil society and protection of human rights are important for democracy and thus for security. Norway sees it as vital that non-governmental organisations continue to take part in our meetings and conferences in line with established practice.

It is also fitting on this occasion to pay a special tribute to the outgoing Representative on the Freedom of the Media, Mr Miklos Haraszti, for his untiring efforts to promote freedom of expression across our region. Norway trusts that the next Representative will live up to the same high standards.

Mr. Chairman.

We warmly welcome the Irish offer to assume the Chairmanship in 2012.

We look forward to the incoming Chairmanship of Kazakhstan. It is historic and will mark a milestone in the Eurasian dimension of the organisation. We welcome Kazakhstan's high ambitions, and believe that this will provide an excellent opportunity for Kazakhstan to promote the fundamental values of the OSCE in Kazakhstan and across the region. We also believe that the OSCE will benefit from the knowledge, experience and outlook offered by Kazakhstan, given her geography, history and culture.

We have taken note of the proposal for a Summit in 2010 and we look forward to identifying the topics and expected outcomes that would justify such a major event.

We would like to assure Foreign Minister Saudabajev of Norway's full support in the year ahead. We look forward to working with him and his team in developing the OSCE into an even more useful tool for dialogue and cooperation between the participating States.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.