



**PERMANENT DELEGATION
OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE**

Statement in response to the address by the ODIHR director
as delivered by Ambassador Robert Kvile
to the Permanent Council, Vienna March 15, 2012

Mr. Chairperson,

It is with genuine pleasure I welcome Ambassador Janez Lenarčič among us again. I fully subscribe to the appreciation expressed by Denmark on behalf of the EU for all the valuable contributions he and his highly competent staff produce in the all-important field of democratic institutions and human rights.

I am pleased to share with other delegations our own positive experiences from cooperating with ODIHR. Norway benefited from a thorough Election Assessment Report by ODIHR from our Parliamentary elections in September 2009, and last year we asked for assistance from ODIHR for evaluation of a pilot project on internet voting in our local elections.

We have informed the OSCE on the follow up of the 2009 report. The *internet voting* report was issued by ODIHR on March 2. I am pleased to report to the PC that this expert report has been favourably received by our Ministry of Local Government which has already stated its intention to engage in a discussion with ODIHR on their recommendations. We urge all other participating States, the latest being the Russian Federation, to engage with ODIHR in the same way on a constructive follow-up of election recommendations with subsequent reports back to the PC.

The same Norwegian Ministry has been asked by ODIHR to contribute in a roundtable discussion as part of an electoral reform project in Albania. We are happy to contribute with our experiences. We deem it a sign of trust and confidence when being asked by ODIHR to participate in such a project. ODIHR has set a standard for observations that no other regional organisations are even close to fulfil.

Mr. Chairperson,

We note with pleasure the emphasis given in Director Lenarčič's introduction on gender issues and we welcome the Irish Chairmanship's prioritisation of this extremely important field. We stand ready to contribute to the work for increased gender equality on all levels of the organisation as well as in the participating States.

We are concerned by the challenges outlined in the implementations of commitments on freedom of peaceful assembly in certain participating States. We link this also to the warnings given by the Representative on Freedom of the Media about the way participating States are increasingly shackling the Internet with restrictive rules that bear the risk of limiting the

voices heard through new media, with attendant restrictions on media pluralism. There is no excuse for limiting these fundamental rights in the OSCE area.

Another worrying issue in Director Lenarčič's introduction is the human rights situation in Belarus. We are grateful for the trial observations conducted by ODIHR. We are also very much concerned about issues raised last year in the report by the OSCE Moscow Mechanism Rapporteur in which one of the findings is that "Beneath some legal niceties, there is neither independent justice, nor rule of law." We also note the recommendation that: "It is urgent for Belarus to respect its international commitments in the framework of the OSCE and the UN and to accept a full and permanent monitoring of the human rights, by independent organs and bodies." This is, Mr. Chairperson, a matter of direct and legitimate concern to all participating states, and we urge Director Lenarčič to continue his efforts to get into a dialogue with the Government of Belarus on these issues.

Allow me a few words also on the issue of the Human Dimension Events. We are all aware of the many interests invested in what is commonly referred to as "the package". This is a delicate task for any chairmanship. However, we do understand the concerns raised by Director Lenarčič in regard of the management problems caused by the limited time left for him to plan the different events when the package is finally agreed. There is a need for a different way of deciding on the modalities as there is a need for more efficiency of the Human Dimension events. In this respect, Mr. Chairperson, we support Director Lenarčič's suggestion to introduce more flexibility into the agenda to allow for more quality and value-added discussions.

Before I conclude, I would like to commend Director Lenarčič for his dedicated work. Our common histories have clearly demonstrated that there is no lasting stability and security without democracy and human rights. He and his Office play a very important role in achieving that goal in the OSCE area. We wish him and his competent and dedicated staff every success in their future work.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson