



PERMANENT DELEGATION
OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE

STATEMENT BY NORWAY
As delivered by Ambassador Guttorm Vik
to the OSCE Review Conference,
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Opening Session

Mr. Chairperson,

Let me first join previous speakers in expressing a sincere vote of thanks to the Polish host government for its hospitality, and to the Kazakh Chair and to Director Lenarcic and his able ODIHR team for all the hard work laid down in the preparations for this important event.

I would also like to thank the representative of Belgium, speaking on behalf of the EU and a number of other countries, for presenting views and positions which are very representative also for the positions of my Government, allowing me to concentrate my remarks on a few issues that we see as particularly important at this juncture.

Reviewing the results of our OSCE cooperation over the years - as we should do at a review conference - we can proudly note that we have a number of very important achievements to our credit.

We have developed and refined the concept of **comprehensive security**, acknowledging that there is no true security for states without security for individuals.

We have entered into a series of commitments to respect and uphold various key aspects of human rights.

We have also, mainly thanks to ODIHR, developed a system of election observation that is generally hailed as the “gold standard” of international election observation.

We have established a number of important institutions and mechanisms of peer review to monitor progress and assist us in the implementation of our commitments. And in Moscow in 1991, we “categorically and irrevocably declared that the commitments undertaken in the field of the human dimension are matters of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States, and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the State concerned”.

But the job is far from done. We still see regrettably many examples of non-respect for basic human rights, among which violence and threats against journalists and human rights defenders are particularly worrisome, due to their effects on the freedom of expression and democracy in our societies at large. In some areas, developments have gone in the wrong direction during the last few years.

That being so, we must maintain and further strengthen the emphasis on basic human rights and fundamental freedoms in our OSCE cooperation. In view of the increasingly multi-ethnic character of our societies, values like tolerance and non-discrimination are also increasingly important, but not to the detriment of continued attention to fundamental human rights issues like freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom of religion, rule of law and free and democratic elections.

At the Astana summit, our heads of state and government must make a resounding reaffirmation of all our already undertaken commitments. Furthermore, they must agree to improve their implementation, both in the form of some concrete further steps that may be ripe for decision, and in the form of a concrete action plan for further follow-up.

A case in point is a more comprehensive and systematic **follow-up to election observation**. The election observation missions themselves have by and large been very successful over the past few years, yielding joint and agreed assessments by the various participants, and very thorough and well-documented reports from ODIHR about any shortcomings. The main room for improvement is clearly to be found in the **follow-up** given to the reports by participating states. I am pleased to recall that Norway, in close cooperation with ODIHR, made a pioneering effort after our parliamentary elections last fall, by giving the election mission report a prominent place in the national evaluation and follow-up exercise, and by providing thorough reports to the Human Dimension Committee, to the Permanent Council and to the Anniversary Conference in Copenhagen. We consider that such follow-up and reporting should become a regular feature of the procedures to be followed after each election observation, in conformity with the Istanbul commitment to “follow-up promptly the ODIHR’s election assessment and recommendations”. I also draw attention to a food-for-thought paper in the Corfu process to the same end that was championed by Romania and enthusiastically co-sponsored by Norway and others.

Let me stress, for the sake of good order, that peer review and follow-up should not be an exercise consisting in some participating states teaching lessons to others. Democracy and respect for human rights is not something that can be achieved once and for all. We all have room for improvement, and we should put the advice we receive from our institutions and from the peer reviews to the best possible use. And we should agree at the Astana summit to a number of concrete steps in that direction, and to work constructively towards further steps.

NGOs and a vibrant civil society are also indispensable partners in our efforts to live up to our commitments, and we must put their contributions to the best possible use, both at home and in international fora, notably the OSCE.

I have devoted these comments to the human dimension, but I would like to conclude by once more highlighting a human dimension issue that is **the** prime example of a cross-dimensional issue, with a very direct impact on regional peace and stability. I am referring to the treatment of national minorities, which plays a very prominent and troubling role as a root cause for many of the protracted conflicts in our area. The High Commissioner on National Minorities has developed a very pertinent and useful set of recommendations on how to deal with these issues in interstate relations in such a way as to ensure that national minorities get the treatment they are entitled to, to foster good neighborly relations, and to avoid that they could become a source of friction and conflict between state. Full respect for these Bolzano/Bozen recommendations would thus represent a big contribution to increased peace and stability in our region.

Thank you for your attention.