



PERMANENT DELEGATION OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE

STATEMENT BY NORWAY

As delivered by Ambassador Robert Kvile to the 2012 Human Dimension implementation meeting, Warsaw 2 October 2012 – Working Session 12

Thank you, Madame Moderator,

Let me join previous speakers in thanking the High Commissioner on National Minorities for his introduction. I fully subscribe to what he said about multilingualism and the difficult and delicate balance between protecting and promoting minority languages and increasing the knowledge of the State language.

Allow me as a follow up on his introduction to say a few words about minorities and language in my country. Norway has one indigenous people – the Sami people – and a few national minorities, among them Roma, travelers and two groups descending from immigration from Finland. During the last four – five decades immigration to Norway also from countries beyond Europe has made Norway into a heterogenous society, also in linguistic terms.

I will use the situation of the Sami people to illustrate how attitudes to minority languages have changed in my country.

Until the 1960ies the Norwegian government led a rather forceful assimilation policy towards the Sami people. Only in 1967 the Sami language was allowed to be spoken in schools in those areas of Norway where Sami was still in common use. From 1990 on the Sami language has been protected by law, and made officially equal with the State language in a number of administrative areas of Norway.

In short, in just a few decades my country has moved from a policy of assimilation to a policy of mutual respect and understanding, which, to me, is exactly what the High Commissioner advised us to do.

Madame Moderator,

Languages spoken by small minorities need more than protection. They also need support and encouragement.

Until recently many Sami parents preferred their children to switch to Norwegian. Assimilation was thought to be necessary for success on the labour market and in the society in general. We have managed to change this approach. Today the young generation is proud to be Sami and they want to learn and use their own language.

Madame Moderator,

Allow me furthermore to touch upon two additional issues. The first one being the warning that the current economic crises may also negatively affect democracy, security and the attitudes towards ethnic minorities. In this respect, we call for a broader support for the work done by the OSCE and its institutions. In times of crisis our organization needs more funding, not less, since the threats to our common security increases as a result of the economic crises.

The other one is our repeated call for an upgrade of the High Commissioner's Bolzano/Bozen recommendations on national minorities in inter-state relations. These recommendations should be formally made part of our common OSCE aquis.

Allow me also to reiterate my government's full support for the High Commissioner's work, including by participating in the upcoming conference in Slovenia on Guidelines on integration of diverse societies.

Madame Moderator, thank you for your attention.