



PERMANENT DELEGATION  
OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE

COOPERATION WITH ODIHR IN FOLLOW-UP TO THE ELECTION  
MISSION ASSESSMENT REPORT ON PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS  
IN NORWAY IN SEPTEMBER 2009

Statement by the Delegate of Norway, Ambassador Jørg Willy Bronebakk

At the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference

Copenhagen, 11 June 2010

Session 5: Measures to improve implementation of human dimension commitments

Mr. Moderator,

First, allow me to thank the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Kazakhstan Chairmanship in Office for convening this important anniversary conference.

**Democratic elections** are the cornerstone of any democratic system.

Independent, objective and professionally conducted **election observation** is an important means to enhance transparency and assure confidence in elections. No less importantly, good election observation reports provide the host government with the tools needed to address shortcomings and ensure that the next round of elections can take place in an improved environment.

The OSCE can be justly proud of its election observation system, for which we are mainly indebted to ODIHR's well-developed and well-tried methods for observing **before, during and after** elections. A no lesser figure than the SG of the UN recently referred to this method as "the gold standard" in election observation. Many attacks have been made against this system from various quarters. Against that background, it is particularly gratifying to note that all the recent election observation missions have gone very well, providing agreed and uncontested assessments, and very thorough and well-documented reports, on which the

governments can base their efforts to address shortcomings and improve and perfection their election systems.

The widest scope for improvement in this crucially important area is clearly to be found in the **implementation** of the commitments we have all undertaken, not least here in Copenhagen 20 years ago, and in the national **follow-up** to the election observation reports.

Introducing a form of **regular reporting procedures** would be a big step in that direction. Norway is the enthusiastic co-sponsor of a food-for-thought paper to that effect submitted in the Corfu process.

Today, I am pleased to be able to report to you that Norway has recently shown in practice how this can be done and thus set a good example, by reporting to the most relevant OSCE fora. This was first done in the Human Dimension Committee last Tuesday, where my colleague the Norwegian OSCE Ambassador, ably assisted by two officials from the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, as well as a representative from ODIHR, provided a substantive overview of the steps planned and already undertaken in follow-up to ODIHR's Election Assessment Mission report from the Parliamentary elections in Norway last September. And yesterday, my colleague followed up with a brief, but substantive summary report to the Permanent Council. All the statements to the Human Dimension Committee and the Council are or will be available through the usual documents distribution services of the OSCE.

With your permission, Mr. Moderator, I would like to offer a brief summing up of the election observation conducted in Norway last September and the follow-up given to it so far, as an illustration of how a regular procedure of reporting can be undertaken.

On the occasion of the regular Parliamentary elections in Norway on 14 September last year, ODIHR sent first, at the invitation of the Government, a Needs Assessment Mission that made a very thorough evaluation of the situation prevailing in Norway. On the basis of that assessment, the ODIHR deployed an Election Assessment Mission (EAM) of 10 experts for a period of two weeks around the election. About 100 other accredited observers also observed the elections.

On 27 November, ODIHR published the final report of the Election Assessment Mission (ODIHR.GAL/80/099), with a number of well-documented and well-

reasoned observations, suggestions and recommendations. The main findings were as follows:

*“Norway has a long tradition of holding democratic elections, and the conduct of the 14 September elections confirmed that Norwegian elections are characterized by political pluralism, respect for fundamental freedoms and rights, a high degree of public trust in the impartiality of the election administration, and the integrity of the process as a whole. The authorities have displayed a particular responsiveness to remedy existing weaknesses in the electoral process and improve it further.”*

Notwithstanding this generally very positive assessment, ODIHR also pointed to a number of particularities in the Norwegian electoral system that might be worthy of review and reconsideration. I should underline that the tailor-made approach of ODIHR’s deployment assisted it greatly in identifying the salient points most in need of review in the Norwegian electoral system. In this particular case, that approach consisted of mainly reviewing certain systemic features of a generally well-functioning election system, rather than dispatching large numbers of observers to monitor the conduct of the elections.

The competent Norwegian authorities have studied these observations and recommendations very carefully and held two very substantive follow-up meetings with ODIHR, which also participated in the major assessment and evaluation exercise for Norwegian election officials.

As a result of these considerations and consultations, a number of concrete follow-up steps have already been initiated. The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development has established a separate website in English on the follow-up given to ODIHR’s EAM report, where, inter alia, the Ministry’s formal response to the report can be found:

[http://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/krd/kampanjer/election\\_portal/election-observation/The-Norwegian-follow-up-of-OSCEs-Election-Assessment-Mission-report.html?id=608279](http://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/krd/kampanjer/election_portal/election-observation/The-Norwegian-follow-up-of-OSCEs-Election-Assessment-Mission-report.html?id=608279)

As we all know, legislative changes, and not least those relating to elections, are often very time-consuming. Some of the changes suggested and contemplated would require changes in the Constitution, which have to be approved by two successive parliaments, meaning that they could enter into force at the earliest in 2017. Nevertheless, a number of concrete steps have already been taken to further improve upon the Norwegian electoral system, based on the recommendations made after the last election. These relate, inter alia, to duty of citizens to accept nominations to run for office, the design of the ballot and the sealing of ballot

boxes. A comprehensive *consultation paper*, containing inter alia ODIHR's recommendations and the Ministry's response, comments and proposals has been sent out on a public hearing process, addressed to 600 organisations and instances and open for comments by anybody. That process will last for three months. All statements received are published on the Ministry's website. Thereafter, the Ministry will make some legislative proposals to the Parliament.

The Norwegian authorities appreciate highly the useful contributions and excellent cooperation offered by ODIHR throughout the process.

The Norwegian government is of the firm conviction that in order to maintain a vibrant democracy, it is of vital importance to continuously seek to improve election procedures, and a major review is carried through after each election. ODIHR's observations and recommendations constituted a highly valued input into the review conducted in follow-up of last year's election.

We hope there will be many similar reports in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Moderator.