



PERMANENT DELEGATION OF NORWAY
TO THE OSCE

STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO THE DIRECTOR OF
THE OFFICE FOR DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Delivered by Ambassador Steffen Kongstad at the Permanent Council
Vienna, 14 May 2020

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

It is a pleasure to welcome ODIHR Director Ingibjörg Gísladóttir back to the Permanent Council, and I thank her for her presentation of the ODIHR Annual Report for 2019.

We continue to appreciate the integration of a gender perspective in the annual report. Gender mainstreaming helps achieve our primary objectives of conflict prevention and promoting democracy and human rights. Recognising this, every main narrative part of the report includes evidence of gender mainstreaming. While this is welcome, some sections leave us wanting even more. One example is the section on supporting the fair and transparent appointment of judges, where more information on the gender perspective would make a lot of sense.

The level of women's participation in various ODIHR activities can be a useful indication of the extent of gender mainstreaming, and ODIHR's transparency on participation is commendable. In 2019, most events had significant representation of both women and men. This is as it should be. Gender mainstreaming is not a women's issue, but a responsibility we all bear to ensure the most effective implementation of our commitments.

Still, we must continue to think hard about what impact our activities have on gender equality, both within the OSCE and within the participating States. This is difficult work, but absolutely necessary. After all, it is not our activities as such, but their impact that makes a difference.

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As in previous years, the report presented today demonstrates the integrity and professionalism of ODIHR and its staff, and the importance of promoting human rights, democracy, free elections, the rule of law, and more. From ODIHR, the participating States get steadfast adherence to OSCE principles and commitments along with efficiency and managerial professionalism. While we regret the, in real terms, ever diminishing budgets of ODIHR, it offers some comfort to see the resources well utilised.

In 2019, ODIHR observed 15 elections in 15 participating States. More than half of these were full-scale observation missions. ODIHR's comprehensive, needs-based, consistent and systematic methodology for election observation ensures credibility and high-quality recommendations to the participating States. Last year, lack of resources precluded observation of elections in Norway as well as in Denmark.

When the methodology calls for it and resources permit, we wish that ODIHR would observe more elections in Norway, in Denmark, and other countries such as ours. That requires more resources. When some delegations instead seek to further reduce ODIHR's resources, they are merely aiming to confirm their own bias that ODIHR observes only them, while also stalling the implementation of agreed commitments. We need to remind ourselves that we bear the responsibility collectively to provide ODIHR with the necessary resources to carry out its mandate.

During the ongoing pandemic, election observation is made very difficult by travel restrictions and other measures to prevent infection. Resources alone cannot solve these difficulties; we support all efforts to allow ODIHR fulfil its mandate to the fullest extent that the situation permits.

In essence, ODIHR's mission is very simple. We, the participating States, established it to assist us in ensuring full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, the rule of law, and all other human dimension commitments. As part of this mandate, ODIHR is to monitor our compliance with these commitments. ODIHR is to implement it autonomously under the direction of Director Gisladóttir. She enjoys our full trust and support in fulfilling ODIHR's increasingly relevant mandate.

The mandate's relevance has clearly been shown during the ongoing pandemic. In countering the virus, some states have increased the power of the executive at the expense of the rule of law and the separation of powers. Some have sought to make such changes permanent. As an institution common to all participating States, ODIHR is here to assist us in ensuring that our measures uphold human rights, democratic principles, and the rule of law. That is valuable assistance indeed, because – if heeded – it contributes fundamentally to our common security.

Thank you