



**PERMANENT DELEGATION
OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE**

STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO AMBASSADOR JANEZ LENARCIC

As delivered by Ambassador Guttorm Vik
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
30 October 2008

Mr. Chairman,

Let me first join previous speakers in warmly welcoming Ambassador Lenarcic back to the Permanent Council, and in thanking him for his first report in his new capacity as Director of the ODIHR. We notably appreciate his comprehensive report on the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, with which we in general fully concur.

All the participating States are, as Ambassador Lenarcic pointed out, equally bound by their commitments to principles of democracy and human rights. As one of the main institutions of the OSCE, the ODIHR has time and again demonstrated the importance of its mission, by providing fact-based, objective monitoring of our performances and by supporting participating States in making our best efforts to adhere to the standards and commitments we all signed up to. We firmly believe that the ODIHR will only remain effective as long as its independence and autonomy is preserved.

Regrettably, Mr. Chairman, in some participating states we still see breaches of agreed commitments, including fairly frequent occurrences of systematic election fraud. In a situation where adherence to accepted commitments is lacking or inadequate, independent institutions like the ODIHR have a vital role to play in making independent, well-founded assessments of the situation, and in offering practical assistance to remedy shortcomings.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me once again commend the ODIHR for its internationally recognised methodology in election observation. Norway fully supports the ODIHR's professional and impartial role and expertise in this area. The participation of election monitors from various Parliamentary Assemblies is highly useful and welcome, but ODIHR, with its fact-based methodology and its mandate to observe "before, during and after" the elections, is in our view the overall most important actor in election observation. Accordingly, ODIHR should play a leading and coordinating role in all election observation missions in the OSCE region. Like the EU, we applaud the ODIHR's efforts to work together with the Parliamentary Assembly and would like to underline that the cooperation between these two institutions is and should be a common endeavour based on the 1997 Cooperation Agreement.

I note in parenthesis a certain surprise not to have found a single reference to ODIHR and cooperation with ODIHR in all the material that I have seen coming out from the Parliamentary Assembly about the PA's own, very impressive preparations for observation of the imminent elections in the USA, covering also the pre-election phase. It is important that the various related institutions agree on a rational division of responsibilities and cooperate fully in all phases of the election observation.

Mr. Chairman,

The Human Dimension Implementation meeting is one of the most important events in the OSCE calendar for taking stock of where we stand in the implementation of OSCE commitments. This year again, the active participation of a high number of NGOs provided valuable inputs to our discussions. Norway remains firmly committed to an active and extensive NGO participation in OSCE events along the existing modalities, as set out in the Helsinki Document of 1992. We are concerned about the working conditions for NGOs in a number of participating states and we would like to see further focus on and support to Human Rights Defenders, as fundamental elements of a strong civil society.

Mr. Chairman,

A substantial body of commitments has been accumulated over the years within the human dimension of the OSCE. Correspondingly, the workload of the ODIHR has been steadily increasing. I would therefore take this opportunity to again underline our responsibility to provide the resources necessary to make it possible to implement our recommendations and

decisions in practice. This should particularly be kept in mind in our ongoing discussions on the 2009 Unified Budget.

I am pleased to take this opportunity to inform Ambassador Lenarcic that Norway will contribute €100.000 to the ODIHR's extra-budgetary activities, in support notably of ongoing activities in promoting the freedom of religion or belief and in assistance to legislative reform.

Mr. Chairman,

Norway warmly welcomes the efforts by the ODIHR and the High Commissioner on National Minorities to assess the human rights and minority situation in Georgia, at the request of the Chairman in Office. We were therefore disturbed to learn about the recent refusal to grant the representatives of the ODIHR and the HCNM access to South Ossetia. I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate the importance and urgency of securing free and unrestricted access to all war affected areas for the representatives of these institutions.

Finally Mr. Chairman,

Norway looks forward to continuing our close cooperation with Ambassador Lenarcic and his dedicated and competent staff.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman