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**PERMANENT DELEGATION
OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE**

**STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO THE ADDRESS BY THE CHAIRPERSON-
IN-OFFICE, FOREIGN MINISTER OF LITHUANIA, H.E. AUDRONIUS
AŽUBALIS**

As delivered by Ambassador Guttorm Vik to the Permanent Council,
Vienna January 13, 2010

Mr. Chairperson,

It is a pleasure for Norway to warmly welcome the new Chairperson-in-Office, His Excellency Foreign Minister Audronius Ažubalis, to the Permanent Council on the occasion of this first meeting under the Lithuanian chairmanship. We look forward to a close cooperation with you and your team, and stand ready to support the Chairmanship in addressing the many challenges lying ahead. Let me also take this opportunity to pay another well-deserved tribute to the outgoing Kazakhstani Chairmanship for their dedicated efforts over the past year, not least in so diligently and successfully preparing and hosting last year's landmark event, the Astana Summit.

Mr. Chairperson,

Norway welcomes the priorities presented by the new Chairperson-in-Office. We share your emphasis on OSCE's continuing role in contributing to resolve the protracted conflicts, and we agree with previous speakers that this is a joint responsibility of all participating states. We believe that OSCE's capacity to tackle existing and emerging conflicts needs to be improved considerably, and we can assure the incoming Chairmanship of our full support to initiatives that would bring us closer to achieving this goal. The same goes for the further follow-up of the Summit, where participating States tasked the next Chairmanships to take a number

of concrete actions in areas that were identified in the preparation of the Summit and the Corfu process. We, too, stand ready to continue the informal dialogue on European security.

Mr. Chairperson,

Norway agrees with the C-i-O that the human dimension remains a key priority on the agenda of the OSCE, as was appropriately highlighted in the Astana Declaration. Without democracy and full respect for human rights, including fundamental freedoms and rule of law, there will be no lasting security and stability. We highly appreciate your commitment to support the autonomy and the work of the OSCE institutions that are our most important tools in assisting participating States in achieving this goal, namely the ODIHR, the High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Representative on Freedom of the Media.

In particular, we have taken positive note of the Chairperson-in-Office's intention to devote special attention to media freedom. As was strongly emphasized by the Representative of the Freedom of the Media in her report to the Permanent Council in December, the need for vigilance in this field is as strong as ever. Numerous reports and statements show that fundamental principles are in jeopardy and that entire regions, also inside the OSCE area, are actually slipping when it comes to safeguarding freedom of expression and media freedom. We look forward to the conference on the safety of journalists to be held in Vilnius later this year.

Like others, we believe that the work of our field missions is one of the greatest assets of the OSCE and a most valuable tool in assisting participating States in their efforts to implement OSCE commitments. We therefore highly welcome the stated intention of our new Chairperson-in-Office to give high priority to supporting their work. In this context, Norway expresses her strong support to the Chairmanship's efforts vis-à-vis the government of Belarus to reconsider its decision to not renew the mandate of the OSCE Office in Minsk, - a decision which we deeply regret.

Mr. Chairperson,

We also welcome the Chairperson-in-Office's intention to follow-up on the important work of previous chairmanships in addressing transnational threats, with particular emphasis on trafficking in human beings and drugs, as well as cyber crime and combating international terrorism. We also agree to a further strengthening of the OSCE engagement with Afghanistan, in particular with regard

to border management. Problems originating from this region still remain among the most serious threats to security and stability in the OSCE region.

Mr. Chairperson,

Norway welcomes the progress achieved in the ongoing talks on the way ahead with regard to overcoming the current impasse on the CFE Treaty, and hopes it will be possible to agree on opening formal negotiations on this very important issue as soon as possible. We also note with satisfaction the progress achieved in the framework of the Forum for Security Co-operation on updating Confidence and Security Building Measures regimes, and hope that agreement on a substantially modernized Vienna Document can be reached within the end of the year. A positive outcome of negotiations on a revitalized CFE Treaty and an updated Vienna Document would be tangible proofs of common interests and an important contribution to restoring confidence and trust among participating States.

In concluding, allow me again to congratulate Foreign Minister Ažubalis on assuming this important responsibility as Chairperson-in-Office and wish him and his capable teams in Vilnius and Vienna all possible success. Mr. Minister, you can be assured of Norway's support and constructive cooperation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.