



**PERMANENT DELEGATION
OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE**

STATEMENT ON CIVIL SOCIETY IN HUNGARY

As delivered by Ambassador Robert Kvile
to the Permanent Council,
Vienna, 19 June 2014

Mr Chairman,

A free, active and influential civil society is of paramount importance if a country is to enjoy a thriving democracy. In a number of decisions, including at Astana in 2010, we underlined “the important role played by civil society and free media in helping us to ensure full respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, democracy, including free and fair elections, and the rule of law”. In the 2003 Strategy Document for the Economic and Environmental Dimension we acknowledged that an active civil society is crucial to good governance as well as to security and stability.

Mr Chairman,

We are concerned when civil society is put under pressure in OSCE participating States. We have criticized legislation introduced in some states that both limits the freedom of civil society and stigmatizes organizations that receive support from outside.

Democracy and human rights are priority areas for my government, at home as well as abroad. Financial support to civil society organizations is a crucial element in this. We support such organizations in a number of countries, including in the Russian Federation and the United States.

Support to civil society is also an important part of the so-called EEA and Norway Grant schemes, under which we contribute to development in several European Union member states.

One of them is Hungary.

Mr Chairman,

We have for some time heard concerns about political interference in the management of the EEA and Norway Grants in Hungary.

In a press statement issued earlier this month, Minister of EEA and European Union Affairs Vidar Helgesen expressed his deep concern about actions of the Hungarian authorities in relation to civil society and their attempts to limit freedom of expression.

The further disbursement of funds to Hungary under the EEA and Norway Grant schemes was suspended on 8 May in reaction to violation by Hungarian authorities of the agreement on the management of the Grants. The funding to NGOs goes through an independent Hungarian fund operator. No funding decisions for support to individual NGOs are made in Norway. The role of this fund operator is not respected by Hungarian authorities.

Mr Chairman,

We are in contact with Hungarian authorities to encourage them to respect the independence of civil society and the terms of our agreements.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.