



**PERMANENT DELEGATION
OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE**

STATEMENT ON THE BICENTENARY OF NORWAY'S CONSTITUTION

As delivered by Ambassador Robert Kvile
to the Permanent Council,
Vienna, 22 May 2014

Mr Chairman,

May 17th marked the bicentenary of Norway's constitution. In 1814 it was a modern constitution, inspired by the French Revolution and the American Declaration of Independence. It is the oldest in Europe, and the second oldest in the world, that is still in use. Our constitution was based on the principles of sovereignty of the people, separation of powers and individual rights. Freedom of expression was explicitly guaranteed.

The core values of the constitution are preserved, but of course it has been amended several times over the years. If we look at the original today, there are obvious elements that did not stand the test of time: Freedom of religion was for example not included. Jews, Catholic monastic orders and Jesuits were denied access to the kingdom. Fortunately, Norwegian parliamentarians have since then been influenced by far-sighted individuals and by political ideas from other countries. These shortcomings have therefore been rectified over time. Human rights have progressively been included.

Mr Chairman,

In a speech recently, His Majesty King Harald commented on the discussions among the 112 representatives who gathered in 1814 to write the constitution. They did not immediately agree on everything, the King said. In fact, there was disagreement, discussions and compromises. Perhaps, the King concluded in his speech, that is precisely the reason the constitution became as good as it did.

Mr Chairman,

Accepting differences and being willing to seek compromises can lay the foundations for documents that will stand for 200 years.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.