



PERMANENT DELEGATION OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE

NORWEGIAN STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO DEPUTY MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, H.E. ALEXEY Y. MESHKOV

As delivered by Ambassador Robert Kvile
to the Permanent Council 14th March 2013

Mr. Chairman

I join previous speakers in welcoming Deputy Foreign Minister Meshkov to the Permanent Council and I thank him for his presentation.

Mr. Chairman,

Norway and Russia enjoy good neighbourly relations. Our cooperation covers a broad range of issues, including energy, business, military-to-military contacts, nuclear safety and management of living marine resources. In the North we have during the last 20 years developed strong links across the Norwegian-Russian border. The entering into force last year of a bilateral agreement on visa-free travel for border area residents is one example of this. In 2010 our two countries signed an agreement on the delimitation line between Norway and the Russian Federation in the Barents Sea. This agreement will further expand our cooperation in the North.

Norway and Russia meet frequently and regularly for consultations, on political as well as on civil servant level. A solid bilateral relationship creates a basis for open and frank discussions also when our positions differ.

Mr. Chairman,

I find myself in broad agreement with the points raised by the European Union and I associate myself with their statement.

I would however like to make the following points on OSCE and OSCE related issues.

We share the Russian view that we need to strengthen the OSCE and make sure that our organization remains relevant for meeting the challenges of the 21st century. Like Russia we are hopeful that the Helsinki +40 process will be instrumental in this regard. Norway will contribute to the process in a flexible and pragmatic way. I must however underline that a basic prerequisite for our efforts to strengthen the OSCE must be full implementation of

existing commitments, within and across all three dimensions. Unlike Russia we believe that safeguarding the independence and professional integrity of the OSCE institutions is important in order for our organization to remain strong and relevant.

Mr. Chairman,

Europe clearly needs a strong and credible system for Conventional Arms Control. All stand to benefit from stability, transparency and predictability in conventional military affairs in Europe. Norway will take an active part in further efforts to develop a platform for a modern Arms Control System that better responds to the political and strategic requirements of today.

Mr. Chairman,

We are pleased to note that Deputy Foreign Minister Meshkov underlines that the human dimension is an important part of our comprehensive concept of security. We share his view. We also share the view that issues as visa barriers and xenophobia represent important areas of our work, but we note at the same time that Deputy Foreign Minister Meshkov did *not* mention issues that for us and most other OSCE participating States are even more important, for example freedom of speech and freedom of peaceful assembly. We also seem to differ on the role that civil society should play in our democracies. We have on several occasions, also bilaterally and on political level, voiced our concern that new Russian legislation on civil society organizations may have negative implications on their activity.

We have also voiced our concerns about the situation for LGBT persons in Russia following laws forbidding so-called gay propaganda.

I would however like to note, Mr. Chairman, that disagreement should not prevent us from cooperating, neither in the OSCE nor in other organizations or bilaterally.

But in order to move forward we must together help develop a culture of cooperation, in which we all give and take.

By way of conclusion, I reiterate that we look forward to working with the Russian Federation – and other OSCE participating States – towards making the Helsinki + 40 process a success.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman