



PERMANENT DELEGATION OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE

STATEMENT BY NORWAY, SUPPLEMENTARY HUMAN DIMENSION MEETING ON
FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT AND HUMAN CONTACTS, SESSION III: INNOVATIVE
APPROACHES TO FACILITATE CROSS-BORDER MOBILITY IN THE OSCE REGION

As delivered by Ambassador Robert Kvile,

Vienna 26th April 2013

Thank you, Madam Moderator,

Let me start off by saying that I appreciate the points Mr. Gerald Knaus made in his introduction. I would like to supplement him by introducing you to an example of best practices from the border area between Norway and Russia, where a bilateral local border traffic agreement has been in force since May last year.

Madam Moderator,

The local border traffic zone includes most of the municipality of Sør-Varanger on the Norwegian side of the border, and in the Russian Federation the municipalities of Nikel and Petschenga and the territories of Zapoljarnyj and Korzunovo. The agreement implies that all holders of a local border traffic permit are granted visa-free entry to the border area of the other state for up to fifteen consecutive days at a time. Approximately 45.000 persons on the Russian side and 9.000 on the Norwegian side are eligible to apply for local border traffic permits.

The need for this arrangement is obvious. In 1990 only 8.000 people crossed the border between Norway and Russia. In 2012 the number had increased to 252.000.

The agreement illustrates our ambition to remove unnecessary border obstacles and to move towards my government's long-term goal of establishing a visa-free travel regime between the Schengen countries and Russia.

Madam Moderator,

The entry into force of the Norwegian – Russian border traffic zone agreement was met with great satisfaction by people on both sides of the Norwegian – Russian border. We expect that the number of holders of a border traffic permit will continue to increase. But the agreement has also been criticized, namely by those who happen to live just outside the 30 kilometre border zone. Many would agree that the arguments they have presented for inclusion in the zone, and thereby in the agreement, make sense.

Madam Moderator,

Norway is the first Schengen country that has opened its border to visa-free travel for citizens of the Russian Federation. For us this is simply yet another step in a process that started 20 years ago with the establishment of the so-called Barents cooperation. The objective of this regional cooperation arrangement is to promote contacts and joint activities between regional authorities, business, culture, NGOs and ordinary citizens in the northernmost counties of Finland, Norway, Sweden and the Russian Federation.

When the prime ministers of the member countries this summer gather to celebrate the first 20 years of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, they will note not only that cooperation in the area now flourish, but also that suspicion and mistrust have been removed.

In this regard the bilateral agreement between Norway and Russia on local border traffic also contributes to the broader objectives of the OSCE, in all three dimensions.

Thank you, Madam Moderator