



PERMANENT DELEGATION OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE

NORWEGIAN STATEMENT ON FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT AND HUMAN CONTACT

As delivered by Nelun Ånestad Muriuki
to the SHDM 25th April 2013
Session 1

Mr. Chairman,

Let me join others in thanking the Ukrainian chairmanship for putting this important topic on our agenda today and Ambassador Azimov for his very eloquent introduction.

The OSCE commitments on freedom of movement dates all the way back to the Helsinki Final Act. The ideals that led to the inclusion of these commitments are even older, and the implementation of such commitments had already begun in regions of the OSCE long before the Helsinki Final Act was drafted.

The Nordic countries formalized a passport free zone in 1952 and expanded this Nordic cooperation into a passport union in 1954. The Union still exists, even though all participating states today also are part of the Schengen area. Norwegian visa policy is developed within the framework of this cooperation.

There are several reasons why Norway for more than 60 years has chosen to develop her visa policy in collaboration with our neighbors rather than as a strictly domestic issue. The rather obvious one is that every border has two sides. An effective border control that also allows for constructive cross-border activities is not possible without cooperation between the parts. We were fortunate in having a mutual Nordic understanding and a culture for cross-border contacts and cooperation that was established centuries ago. But we were also determined to foster further contacts among citizens knowing the importance of closer contacts for the promotion of common understanding and common security.

That much said, the visa policy has not only continued to develop since 1954 or 1975. Through the Schengen cooperation there are rapid developments taking place, both through the legal framework and new developments in technology.

The need for rapid development is also based on the rather extreme increase in travel across border-lines over just a few decades. As a result of this, the number of visa applications to Norway is increasing. Our aim is to keep the process of handling visa applications as transparent and efficient as possible, to facilitate travel for bona fide applicants.

- We could mention that last year, out of around 160 000 visas issued by Norway, almost half of those visas were given to applicants of other participating States.
- Russian citizens constitute our biggest group of applicants, and the approval rate for this group has been high. Last year around 99% of their applications were granted.
- Lately our embassy in Moscow and our consulates general in St. Petersburg and Murmansk have been working to simplify procedures for processing visa applications, within the framework of Schengen. We now issue more multiple-entry visas for this group. In 2012 around half of the applicants from Russia were granted multiple-entry visas.
- The Norwegian Government puts a great emphasis on cooperation with the Russian Federation, and is working to further facilitate border crossings and promote cooperation in particular in our northern regions, a topic we will also address in a later session of this meeting

In general, the Norwegian Government deems the facilitation of border crossings important. In this respect, we find the OSCE commitments to be just as valid and as relevant today as they were when we entered into the first CSCE commitments. Even though the increasing numbers of travelers by themselves prove the positive effects of freer movement, the ideals behind the commitments remain the same and we do all have an obligation to do our utmost to implement these ideas and commitments.

We will continue to advocate this view both inside the Schengen cooperation and in our cooperation with non-Schengen parts on these issues.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.