



**PERMANENT DELEGATION
OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE**

**STATEMENT ON THE REPORT
BY THE HEAD OF THE OSCE OFFICE IN BAKU**

As delivered by Ambassador Robert Kvile
to the Permanent Council,
Vienna, 4 July 2013

Thank you, Mr Chairman,

Norway warmly welcomes Ambassador Koray Targay to the Permanent Council and thanks him for his thorough presentation.

Mr Chairman,

Norway and Azerbaijan enjoy close bilateral relations. Norwegian companies have made considerable investments in Azerbaijan. We meet regularly for discussions of issues of mutual interest, including at political level. During the last few months Norway's Minister of Foreign Affairs visited Baku and Azerbaijan's Minister of Energy and Industry Norway. Our discussions cover a broad range of issues, including topics related to the situation in the Southern Caucasus and other issues on the agenda of the OSCE.

Mr Chairman,

We recognize the progress Azerbaijan has made in various areas. We note, for example, that the poverty rate, according to Ambassador Targay's report, has dropped from 49 percent ten years ago to 5.6 percent last year.

Mr Chairman,

In February last year my delegation commended Azerbaijan for having worked out a National Program for Action to Raise Effectiveness of the Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms. We said that we regard the plan as an expression of ambitions in the area of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. But we also underlined that it is the practical implementation of the plan which is most important.

We believe that Azerbaijan still has a way to go in order to meet its OSCE Human Dimension commitments, including the full exercise of fundamental freedoms. The National Program for Action makes particular references to civil society organizations, but we are concerned that not all such organizations are able to operate freely. We note that the Human Rights House Azerbaijan, which in 2011 was asked by Azerbaijani authorities to cease its activities, still has not been allowed to reopen.

Such negative features are documented in a number of reports and assessments by well-reputed international organizations, including by Freedom House, Reporters without Borders and Transparency International.

Mr Chairman,

In September last year, I had the pleasure, together with a number of colleagues around this table, to visit Baku. At the premises of the OSCE office we met expertise and dedication. While I acknowledge Azerbaijan's right to decide the future profile of the office, I am confident that a continued OSCE presence with a broad mandate would help Azerbaijan take further steps in the right direction, in all three OSCE dimensions.

Mr. Chairman,

The work of Azerbaijan in our organization is to a large degree influenced by the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

This is understandable.

I would, however, like to point out that it is unfortunate that Azerbaijan's priorities in this organization seem, on a regular basis, to stand in the way for a constructive and consensus oriented approach. Too often Azerbaijan is the only country that cannot join consensus in matters where the other 56 agree. This is neither good for our organization nor for Azerbaijan.

Mr Chairman,

The presidential elections this autumn will be a significant event in Azerbaijan's democratic development. We hope to see the elections conducted in full conformity with our OSCE commitments and that all candidates are ensured a level playing field.

We look forward to a timely and unrestricted invitation by Azerbaijan to ODIHR and the Parliamentary Assembly to observe the elections.

Mr Chairman,

I once again thank Ambassador Koray Targay and his team in Baku for their hard work and dedication, and I wish them success in their future endeavors.

Thank you.