

STATEMENT BY THE FOREIGN MINISTER OF NORWAY
MR. JONAS GAHR STØRE
AT THE FIFTEENTH MEETING OF THE OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL,
MADRID, 29 NOVEMBER 2007

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to thank you for the excellent job you and your team have done as Chairman-in-Office. This has been yet another challenging year for the OSCE. But Spain under the able leadership of Minister Moratinos has mastered its task in an excellent fashion.

When times are both challenging and difficult we should remind ourselves why the OSCE is important to us.

It is important because it brings together 56 countries in a constant political dialogue on key issues for the stability of our area. Through good and difficult times we have managed to preserve it as an open channel of communication and dialogue.

It is important because it covers so many of the various components – security, political and human dimension - that we need to address to build and solidify stability in our area. Here the OSCE is unique.

And why is it important to Norway?

Because it has given a tremendous contribution to predictability and confidence across borders – including some of our borders. Minister Lavrov's reference to the Euro-Barents region is one good illustration of what this conference has helped produce.

Because it has contributed to building democratic societies and thereby facilitated enhanced political and economic ties among us – including in our own neighbourhood.

All of this we need to safeguard, because these achievements will be vital for us in the years to come. The OSCE is based on standards and values shared by all of us. They are reflected in commitments we have undertaken. We must live up to these commitments.

Free and fair elections are fundamental to democracy. The methodology developed by the OSCE to monitor elections is internationally recognised as the "gold standard". Let us take good care of it.

Norway has full confidence in the ODIHR's professionalism, impartiality and expertise. We must preserve its integrity and autonomy, independently of shifting political climates. Few elections are flawless. We should all work with the ODIHR, trust its professionalism and not doubt its integrity. We regret that conditions were such that the ODIHR decided not to send observers to the Russian Duma elections and we urge that a solution be found before the presidential elections next year.

Any democracy needs a vibrant civil society. Last week – during my visit to Moscow – I met the Helsinki Watch Committee at the Sakharov Institute. NGOs are indispensable contributors to the functioning of our democracies. And they are an integral part of our work in the OSCE. This role must be maintained. The moral strength of a government should be judged against its readiness to respect the pluralism of civil society.

As fundamental to our democratic values is respect for the freedom of expression and of assembly - as well as for democratic forces of opposition. During the last few weeks, we have – in several countries – witnessed that media have been silenced and opposition forces prevented from exercising their democratic rights. Each and every such action is contrary to our commitments and to the climate of cooperation we should all help to foster.

We are going through difficult times. But we should not forget the success stories. Let me mention some; the High Commissioner on National Minorities performs an important role in fostering peace and respect inside our member states. The Representative on the Freedom of the Media provides assistance to ensure pluralistic societies. The Special Representative on trafficking gives a valuable contribution to combatting a modern form of slavery. The field missions support member states in reforming their societies. The fact that the field mission in Croatia can soon terminate its work testifies to the value of their efforts.

The field mission in Kosovo is now of particular importance. We will need a continued strong international presence regardless of the outcome of the status negotiations. It is difficult to imagine that the OSCE mission will not be even more needed in the future than it has been in the past.

Norway supports the proposal for an OSCE's training role to strengthen border security between Afghanistan and its neighbours. The OSCE has significant experience and therefore a potential added value.

Serious work is now underway to ensure better coordination of the international engagement related to Afghanistan. Let us ensure that OSCE's effort is an integral part of a well coordinated international effort.

Mr. Chairman,

The CFE Treaty has contributed to unprecedented stability and transparency in Europe. Now, our immediate goal must be to have the Adapted Treaty ratified by all. The progress which has been made – after years of deadlock – is encouraging. The package deal, which is on the table, takes into account the legitimate concerns of all parties. It is important that we all do our utmost to reach an agreement on this basis. Until we reach our goal of having the Adapted Treaty enter into force, I urge all to continue living by the current Treaty.

Norway is prepared to ratify the Adapted Treaty based on the present package solution. But I would like to emphasise that the Adapted Treaty represents an integral whole. It must be implemented in full. To us, all three elements of the CFE Treaty are of importance; its information sharing, its verification arrangements and its force ceilings. The flank provisions are of particular importance to my country.

And let me add a general consideration:

An efficient arms control regime belongs just as much on our future security agenda as it has belonged to our past. It is no less relevant and no less important.

In closing, I would like to assure our Finnish colleague, Mr. Ilkka Kanerva, that he has Norway's full support as he now assumes the role of OSCE Chairman-in-Office for 2008. We are looking forward to working with him and his team. The OSCE has been an inspiration to so many – inside our area and outside. We must make sure that it remains both a source of inspiration and a port pool of political will and ability to secure the future of our region.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.