



**PERMANENT DELEGATION
OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE**

As delivered by Ambassador Guttorm Vik
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
18 September 2008

Mr. Chairman,

Like the previous speaker, Norway welcomes the release of Mr Alyaksandr Kazulin, Mr Syarhei Parsyukevich and Mr Andrei Kim, until recently held as political prisoners in Belarus. Although there are still reasons for concern with regard to the human rights situation, we regard these decisions as very promising expressions of progress towards respecting fundamental values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and we hope to see further follow-up in other vital areas. We are hopeful that these steps signal a policy of reform that can pave the way for Norway and other countries to gradually restore normal relations with Belarus and provide a stimulus for intensified cooperation.

Mr. Chairman,

Echoing again the remarks of France on behalf of the EU, Norway believes that the upcoming parliamentary elections on 28 September present another opportunity for Belarus to prove that the country wishes to adhere to democratic principles. We have already noted with great satisfaction that long-term observers from the ODIHR/OSCE were invited on time and without any bureaucratic obstacles. We expect that the Belarus authorities will grant the observation mission working conditions that will enable the observers to conduct their work in an effective manner throughout the whole election process, including the counting of votes.

Finally, we hope that the observation report will show that the conduct of the elections will demonstrate further decisive progress towards completely free and fair elections.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.