



**PERMANENT DELEGATION
OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE**

Statement on the 28 September Parliamentary Elections in Belarus
As delivered by Ambassador Guttorm Vik
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
16 October 2008

Mr. Chairman,

As I stated in the Permanent Council a few weeks ago, my delegations held high hopes that the recently held parliamentary elections in Belarus would be seized by the Belarusian authorities as an excellent opportunity to prove that they wish to fully adhere to democratic principles and commitments, for the benefit of their own people, and at least make substantial progress in that direction.

We were all the more disappointed to receive the preliminary assessments of the OSCE and other observer missions, which stated unequivocally that the conduct of the electoral process fell far short of accepted international standards and commitment.

We take some comfort from the observers' findings to the effect that some, and not totally insignificant progress was registered, compared to previous elections, e.g. improved access for the opposition to the media.

And we salute once more the timely and unrestricted invitation to the international election observers, as well as the generally good cooperation with the observer missions.

The final report of the OSCE observer mission will as usual provide an excellent tool for the Belarusian authorities to remedy the many shortcomings identified in the report. We note with satisfaction a stated willingness on the part of the Belarusian authorities to study carefully the findings of the observers, and we urge them to take full benefit of ODIHR's offer to assist in the further improvement of Belarus' electoral system and environment.

Norway is also ready to continue and reinforce our cooperation with Belarus on its path to full integration into the democratic European family of nations, in particular through further efforts to help develop the civil society in Belarus.

Finally, Mr Chairman, let me reiterate our satisfaction over the important step of releasing the last internationally recognised political prisoners prior to the elections.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.