



PERMANENT DELEGATION  
OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE

OSCE HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING  
2008

Norwegian Statement for the Working Session 17: Democratic Institutions  
As delivered by Senior Adviser Birgit Kleven,  
Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
Warsaw, 9 October 2008

Mr. Moderator,

As we have stated time and again, free and fair elections are the cornerstone of any democracy, and the commitment to organising such elections is arguably the most important commitment that the participating States have undertaken.

In some participating states we still see frequent occurrences of systematic election fraud. In a situation where adherence to accepted commitments is lacking, independent institutions like the ODIHR have a vital role to play, - not for the sake of naming and shaming, but in offering practical assistance to remedy shortcomings. That is why we believe it is so important to preserve ODIHR's autonomy and to strengthen its capabilities.

The election observer mission is a tool which verifies the nuts and bolts of the electoral machinery. If the election outcome is disputed, the blame should not be on the observers. The observer mission is part of the solution, not the problem. A problem would arise if the observation becomes superficial or complacent. Trust is hard to gain, but easily lost. If the voters lose confidence in the observers, they are also likely to lose confidence in the elections as such. In that case, the OSCE will have failed in its mission.

The inclusion of election monitors from various Parliamentary Assemblies is both useful and welcome, but ODIHR, with its mandate to observe "before, during and after" the elections is by far the most important actor in election observation. Accordingly, ODIHR must play a leading and coordinating role in all election observation missions in the OSCE region.

Mr. Moderator,

The success of the election observation missions to Serbia, Georgia and Macedonia earlier this year clearly indicates that there is no crisis in election observation. While some

shortcomings in the conduct of the elections were identified, the election observation went very well, with full cooperation by the host country authorities, and concluded with very thorough, nuanced and undisputed assessments of what had happened. Although we were pleased to note that the Belarusian Government issued a timely invitation to the ODIHR to monitor the recent parliamentary elections, Norway deeply regrets that they, despite some minor improvements, fell well short of international standards.

The observation reports provide the host countries with an excellent tool to identify and remedy existing shortcomings, again with the assistance of ODIHR and the field missions.

Mr. Moderator,

We would once again praise ODIHR for having implemented Brussels decision 19/06 and broadened the geographic scope of election observation missions. This has clearly strengthened the legitimacy of this instrument.

Finally, Mr. Moderator,

We must desist from seeking to shoot the messenger-- to question ODIHR's methodology suggests that participating States have something to hide from an objective assessment. Let us send out a message to the broader OSCE community that our focus remains on the electoral commitments of Copenhagen, Budapest and subsequent Ministerial meetings, that we freely entered into and which constitute the most progressive electoral framework that exists internationally.

Thank you, Mr. Moderator