



**PERMANENT DELEGATION
OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE**

**STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO AMBASSADOR HANS-OLA URSTAD
HEAD OF THE OSCE MISSION TO SERBIA**

As delivered by Ambassador Guttorm Vik
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
5 March 2009

Madame Chairperson,

The Norwegian delegation warmly welcomes Ambassador Urstad back to the Permanent Council and thanks him for his thorough and comprehensive report on the work of the Mission to Serbia.

Like others, we are pleased to note that considerable improvements have taken place in last months with regard to the political framework within which the Mission operates.

We reiterate our firm support for genuine reforms that pave the way for Serbia's integration into the European family, - to which she fully belongs, and reconfirm Norway's readiness to continue our close cooperation with Serbia in this process.

Madame Chairperson,

Like the EU, we recognize the progress achieved in terms of Serbia's cooperation with the ICTY, but underline that Serbia must complete this positive development by full cooperation.

Madame Chairperson,

We are convinced that lasting political stability and economic prosperity in Serbia is dependent on a positive development in the whole region, and in Kosovo in particular.

We would encourage the Serbian government to stress pragmatism in its policy towards the government in Prishtina in order to stabilise the still volatile situation, not least in the north of Kosovo. We believe it would be in Serbia's own interest and to the benefit of all citizens living in Kosovo to envisage a practical cooperation with the Kosovo authorities on problems that hamper economic and social development in the country.

Madame Chairperson,

As mentioned by Ambassador Urstad in his report, the unresolved problem of refugees must not be forgotten. We are reminded of the fact that nearly 300 000 refugees from neighbouring countries still reside in Serbia. It is disappointing that the goals have still not been met, and we encourage the signatory governments to the Sarajevo Declaration to agree on the outstanding issues. We agree with the HoM that the OSCE must remain fully committed to assist in upholding the humanitarian and legal rights of the refugees.

Madame Chairperson,

Like Ambassador Urstad, we are concerned that little progress has been made in the fight against corruption, and we urge the Serbian government to pay more attention to this problem which so profoundly affects large parts of the society. Making the newly

established Anti-corruption Agency and the State Audit Institution fully operational should be given top priority.

We are also concerned that verbal and physical attacks against human rights defenders, including stigmatization of defenders, portraying them as traitors and enemies of the country, still occur in public life in Serbia. It is of particular concern that many of these attacks seems to target women human rights defenders. We appeal to the Serbian government to forcefully denounce such attacks, and to investigate and take appropriate action concerning reports on violations against human rights defenders.

Finally, Madame Chairperson

I would like to commend both the OSCE Mission to Serbia and the host government for the generally exemplary partnership they have developed, where the Mission's many programs play a significant role in implementing the government's own priorities in the important reform process. We congratulate both on the impressive results so far achieved, and encourage them to continue and increase their efforts in areas where progress is still insufficient.

Since this most likely is his last report to the Permanent Council we would like to thank Hans-Ola Urstad for his successful work as Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, and wish him all the best for the future.

I thank you.

