



**PERMANENT DELEGATION
OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE**

**COOPERATION WITH ODIHR IN FOLLOW-UP TO THE ELECTION
MISSION ASSESSMENT REPORT ON PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS
IN NORWAY IN SEPTEMBER 2009**

Statement to the Permanent Council

by the Permanent representative of Norway, Ambassador Guttorm Vik

Vienna, 8 June 2010

Mr. Chairperson,

On the occasion of the regular Parliamentary elections in Norway on 14 September last year, ODIHR sent first, at the invitation of the Government, a Needs Assessment Mission that made a very thorough evaluation of the situation prevailing in Norway. On the basis of that assessment, the ODIHR deployed an Election Assessment Mission (EAM) of 10 experts for a period of two weeks around the election. About 100 other accredited observers also observed the elections.

On 27 November, ODIHR published the final report of the Election Assessment Mission (ODIHR.GAL/80/099), with a number of well-documented and well-reasoned observations, suggestions and recommendations. The main findings were as follows:

“Norway has a long tradition of holding democratic elections, and the conduct of the 14 September elections confirmed that Norwegian elections are characterized by political pluralism, respect for fundamental freedoms and rights, a high degree of public trust in the impartiality of the election administration, and the integrity of the process as a whole. The authorities have displayed a particular responsiveness to remedy existing weaknesses in the electoral process and improve it further.”

Notwithstanding this generally very positive assessment, ODIHR also pointed to a number of particularities in the Norwegian electoral system that might be worthy of review and reconsideration. I should underline that the tailor-made approach of ODIHR's deployment assisted it greatly in identifying the salient points most in need of review in the Norwegian electoral system. In this particular case, that approach consisted of mainly reviewing certain systemic features of a generally well-functioning election system, rather than dispatching large numbers of observers to monitor the conduct of the elections.

The competent Norwegian authorities have studied these observations and recommendations very carefully and held two very substantive follow-up meetings with ODIHR, which also participated in the major assessment and evaluation exercise for Norwegian election officials.

As a result of these considerations and consultations, I am pleased to be able to report to you that a number of concrete follow-up steps have been initiated. The full response of the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development is available in English translation on the Ministry's website

As we all know, legislative changes, and not least those relating to elections, are often very time-consuming. Some of the changes suggested and contemplated would require changes in the Constitution, which have to be approved by two successive parliaments, meaning that they could enter into force at the earliest in 2017. Nevertheless, a number of concrete steps have already been taken to further improve upon the Norwegian electoral system, based on the recommendations made after the last election. These relate, inter alia, to duty of citizens to accept nominations to run for office, the design of the ballot and the sealing of ballot boxes. A comprehensive *consultation paper*, containing inter alia ODIHR's recommendations and the Ministry's response, comments and proposals have been sent out on a public hearing process, addressed to 600 organisations and instances and open for comments by anybody. That process will last for three months. All statements received are published on the Ministry's website. Thereafter, the Ministry will make some legislative proposals to the Parliament.

On Tuesday 8 June, I was able to offer a fairly substantive and concrete overview of the follow-up being given to the Election Assessment Mission report to the Human Dimension Committee, under the Chairmanship of Ambassador Ana Martinho, and answer questions and comments. In this task, I was greatly assisted by Professional Director Marianne Riise and Senior Adviser Tom Refsum Aatlo from the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, with overall

responsibility for election legislation and the conduct of elections in Norway. Ms. Riise's presentation, as well as my introductory remarks, will also be made available in electronic format through the usual distribution channels.

Mr. Andrew Hyslop from ODIHR also contributed to the discussion. He was the captain of ODIHR's election team in Norway, and the main interlocutor of the competent Norwegian authorities in the very substantive cooperation that ensued. The Norwegian authorities appreciate highly the useful contributions and excellent cooperation offered by ODIHR throughout the process.

As emphasized by Ms. Riise in her presentation, the Norwegian government is of the firm conviction that in order to maintain a vibrant democracy, it is of vital importance to continuously seek to improve election procedures, and a major review is carried through after each election. ODIHR's observations and recommendations constituted a highly valued input into the review conducted in follow-up of last year's election.

Finally Mr. Chairperson, I would like to recall several previous discussions, both in the Corfu process and in the Permanent Council and other regular fora, where it has been underlined that the biggest potential for further improving the usefulness of our excellent election observation system lies in improving the **follow-up**. Introducing a form of a regular reporting procedure would be an enormous improvement in this direction. Norway is the enthusiastic co-sponsor of a food-for-thought paper to that effect submitted in the Corfu process. Tuesday's presentation to the Human Dimension Committee and this summary report to the Permanent Council are also meant to set a good example and provide an illustration of how such reporting can be undertaken. We hope there will be many similar reports in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson