



**PERMANENT DELEGATION
OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE**

**STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO THE REPORT
BY THE HEAD OF THE OSCE CENTRE IN ASTANA**

As delivered by Ambassador Robert Kvile
to the Permanent Council,
Vienna, 13 June 2013

Thank you, Mr. Chairman,

I join previous speakers in welcoming Ambassador Natalia Zarudna, Head of the OSCE Centre in Astana, back to the Permanent Council and I thank her for her very thorough presentation.

We are happy to note that the OSCE Centre in Astana continues to be active in all three OSCE dimensions. We are also happy to note that Kazakhstan continues to be actively engaged in and for our organization.

Mr. Chairman,

Norway and Kazakhstan enjoy close bilateral relations. We hosted Kazakhstan's Foreign Minister Erlan Idrisov in Oslo in March this year, when he, together with his Norwegian counterpart, signed a Memorandum on increased cooperation between our countries across all three dimensions of the OSCE.

We also had the pleasure of hosting in Oslo in January this year a Parliamentary delegation from Astana focusing on gender legislation. The study trip was organized by the OSCE Centre in Astana in cooperation with the Norwegian Parliament and the Embassy of Norway.

We are confident that the trip was useful for the participants and that it contributed to the development of the relations between our countries.

We are pleased that we have been able to support also other activities of the OSCE Centre in Astana through extra budgetary contributions.

Mr. Chairman,

We are impressed by the progress Kazakhstan has made within key areas of their society, including in the economy.

We expect the reform process towards more openness and more democracy to continue. We encourage Kazakhstan to continue the criminal justice reform and to remove the last remnants of Soviet style judicial system.

I also take this opportunity to point out that the newly introduced legislation on religious associations and communities must be implemented in a way that does not restrict the freedom of thought, conscience and religion. The fight against extremism cannot justify limitations on fundamental freedoms to which all OSCE participating States are committed.

We would also like to point out that we expect from the authorities of Kazakhstan to respect the freedom of the media and to ensure the safety of journalists. The last report from the Representative on Freedom of the Media indicates that there are examples of restrictions on media that run contrary to our OSCE commitments, one example of this being the closing of the opposition newspaper Respublika.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.