



**PERMANENT DELEGATION
OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE**

**STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO RUSSIAN CONCERNS ABOUT THE RIGHTS OF THE
CHILD IN NORWAY**

As delivered by Ambassador Robert Kvile
to the Permanent Council
Vienna, 21 April 2016

Mr Chairman,

I thank my Russian colleague for raising his concern about the rights of the child in my country. Voicing concerns about the situation in various areas in other OSCE participating States is an important aspect of the work of our organisation.

It is of course also important that we raise our concerns in good faith and that we carefully control the accuracy of the information on which we base our interventions. It is important that we underpin our points with verifiable facts and not by ideological arguments or views taken out of context.

Mr Chairman,

I received a copy of the Russian statement late yesterday afternoon. The Russian statement contains several points that we may want to consider more carefully, in close consultation with the relevant Norwegian authorities. Today I will limit myself to a few preliminary remarks. I am afraid I need slightly more than five minutes, but certainly less than my Russian colleague – he spoke for more than ten minutes.

Mr Chairman,

The rights of children are indeed a priority of my government. Our legislation is based on the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which both Norway and the Russian Federation are parties.

Norwegian law applies to everyone in Norway. All child welfare cases are treated equally, regardless of background, nationality or citizenship.

The basic principle of the Norwegian Child Welfare Act is that the best interest of the child shall be the primary consideration. Taking a child away from his or her parents, for a shorter

or longer period, is always the last resort. There are a number of legal safeguards in this process, including free legal aid to the parents.

Mr Chairman,

Allow me now to make a few comments on the specific points made in the Russian statement. First on numbers, where my Russian colleague refers to a Mr. Marius Reikerås, who according to my Russian colleague is a well-known Norwegian human rights defender. Mr Reikerås is in my country known for being stripped of his license to work as a barrister in 2009 and for being sentenced to five months imprisonment in 2011.

According to this Mr Reikerås, and I quote in Russian, в Норвегии более 70 тысяч детей находятся под контролем таких органов, что составляет более 7% всех несовершеннолетних в стране (in Norway more than 70 000 children are under control of such institutions, which corresponds to more than 7 % of the children in the country).

The facts are as follows: At the end of 2014 (last available figures) the families of 53.088 children were receiving some sort of assistance from Norway's child welfare authorities. This can be advice, guidance, economic aid or free day care. Of these 53.088 altogether 1.665 were in the custody of the child welfare authorities. Of these 1.665 children a total of 35 had Russian background.

These figures are high, but we should put them into context by comparing them with the corresponding figures in other countries.

Such figures are available in a survey made for the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, published in January 2015. It includes a comparison of 30 Council of Europe members and observers (Canada). In the chapter on children not living with their biological parents the 30 countries are divided into three categories.

The first category includes countries in which less than 0.5% of the child population are in care. Among the 9 countries in this category, we find Norway.

The next category includes countries in which up to 0.8% of the child population are in care. On the high end of the scale, in the third category, with up to 1.66% of the child population in care, we find 9 countries, among them the Russian Federation.

Mr Chairman,

Issues related to children with Russian background in custody of the Norwegian child welfare authorities are regularly discussed during bilateral consultations between Norway and Russia. In the last round of exchanges on such issues, in February this year, the Russian side noted progress concerning access to information from the relevant Norwegian authorities.

I was therefore surprised by the tone of the Russian statement today. I was for example surprised by the accusation that – again in the Russian original – “Осло все туже «закручивает гайки» в борьбе с институтом семьи”. What exactly does it mean that Oslo is intensifying the fight against the family as an institution?

Later on we heard that Norwegian authorities more frequently take away children of non-Norwegian than of Norwegian origin, and that this “граничит с расизмом” or “borders on racism”. To underpin this, my Russian colleague refers to a statement made by the Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner for Human Rights Nils Muiznieks about Roma families in Norway, a statement taken out of context.

Towards the end of his statement my Russian colleague seems to imply that the Norwegian Child Welfare authority is partly responsible when or if young and unaccompanied asylum seekers end up as criminals or prostitutes.

Mr Chairman,

There are elements in the Russian statement that may deserve a matter-of-fact and unbiased discussion. It is important that these elements are not overshadowed by unfounded accusations.

I reserve my right to come back to this issue at a later meeting.

Thank you.