

Opening address by State Secretary Torgeir Larsen, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Warsaw, 7 February 2013

Transparency Needed on Short-range Nuclear Weapons

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,
I am happy to be here today to introduce this workshop on an issue of great importance not just for my country, but for the security of the whole Euro-Atlantic region.

Two years ago, Poland and Norway, together with Germany and the Netherlands, presented an initiative calling for transparency on non-strategic nuclear weapons at the meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers in Berlin. This was a follow-up of a bilateral initiative taken by the two countries in 2010 aiming to raise the issue of “short range” nuclear weapons.

The positive response to these initiatives demonstrated that renewed engagement on this important, but overlooked, subject was overdue. At last year’s summit in Chicago, NATO allies agreed to further develop transparency and confidence-building measures with a view to engaging our Russian partners. The participation of think-tanks and academia will be essential in this work.

We see the renewed focus on the issue of short-range nuclear weapons as an important contribution to the revival of the debate on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

Since President Obama’s Prague speech in 2009, the conclusion of the new START treaty, and the 2010 NPT review conference, the international arms control agenda has been revitalised. The successful implementation and follow-up of the new START treaty should form the basis for the next step, a constructive exchange of views on short-range nuclear weapons. At the same time, the positive developments we have seen with regard to strategic arms between the US and Russia, serve to highlight the challenges that short-range nuclear weapons continue to pose. The question of reducing and eliminating short-range nuclear weapons still has not been addressed in any legally binding international instrument or disarmament process.

The numbers of short-range nuclear weapons maintained by the US in Europe and the Russian arsenals have been considerably reduced since the end of the Cold

War. This is a positive development – not least reflecting the limited military usefulness of such weapons today.

However, the fundamental problems associated with short-range nuclear weapons remain. There is a lack of transparency regarding the still substantial arsenals of these weapons in Europe, including a lack of information about their numbers, location, operational status and level of security. By implication, there may also be a greater risk of proliferation and unauthorised use than is the case with strategic nuclear weapons.

The risk posed by the continued presence of numerous tactical nuclear weapons in Europe should be addressed by including them in broader nuclear and arms control frameworks. We firmly believe that progress in this area will strengthen the security of us all.

Transparency and further confidence- and security-building measures should be developed as first steps towards further nuclear disarmament efforts.

Meanwhile, we are still at the ideas stage. This workshop offers an open arena for NGOs and officials from NATO allies, Russia and other European nations to discuss possible ways forward.

Let me offer a few points which I believe are key:

- International cooperation always works best when it is pragmatic – focusing on steps that are of mutual benefit.
- Theoretical disputes that have so often dominated discussions in this field should be avoided.
- Lack of transparency creates insecurity for all parties. Opening up the discussion to include the numbers, types, roles and locations of nuclear weapons will in itself boost security for all parties, as well as laying the basis for considering future reductions.
- Confidence-building is an important part of building NATO–Russia relations. Progress made in some areas can help other areas.
- We should not declare certain topics areas pre-emptively off-limits for discussion. These topics relate to a broad range of security interests and concerns, and discussing them openly may influence our future work.

In closing, let me repeat that renewed focus on the issue of short-range nuclear weapons is contributing to the revival of the debate on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation in general. Positive developments on short –range nuclear disarmament would build confidence to move forward also on other areas of nuclear disarmament. Because our political vision is going beyond the

elimination of short-range nuclear weapons from the Euro–Atlantic region. Our ultimate goal is a world free of nuclear weapons.