

45th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act: UK statement

Thank you Mr Chairman.

In his speech to the 1975 Helsinki Conference, the then UK Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, said that the Final Act would mean little if it were “not reflected in the daily lives of our people”. As we look forward and consider the future of the OSCE and European security, we should keep in mind the impact of what we do on the real lives of our citizens.

We should recognise the progress we have made since then in the OSCE area; but we cannot ignore the continuing, and in some areas increasing, threats to our security, prosperity and freedom and, worse still, the flagrant disregard for the very principles we set out in Helsinki and through the body of CSCE and OSCE agreements since then.

We talk about such violations here, every week when we call on Russia to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. We will do so again later today.

We need to see renewed commitment to the existing conventional arms control mechanisms and CSBMs. We want to see them functioning to their maximum potential, for the benefit of us all. Where they are implemented fully, in letter and in spirit, they increase transparency and trust, and reduce risk and room for misunderstanding and unintended escalation. Where there is selective implementation, exploitation of loopholes or application that is not in the spirit of the agreements, it degrades our instruments, reduces trust and increases risk.

Equally, we need to see real implementation of the commitments in the human dimension, and strengthening of the autonomous institutions in their work to promote the fundamental rights and freedoms that should apply to all our peoples.

Promotion of open dialogue relies not on formal structures in Vienna. We can't speak openly when people in the OSCE region are unable to express their views freely, either through democratic elections, through peaceful assembly and association, or through the media. Providing space for civil society and free media to operate, online as well as offline, is essential if we want to have genuine dialogue and contacts between people. We must end the toxic use of disinformation to sow distrust and fear.

Genuine dialogue and engagement relies on a shared understanding of the principles and commitments we have agreed to and a determination to implement them fully. Respect for the existing commitments is fundamental. Trust and confidence cannot come through abstract discussion but through real acts in the real world. Without that, all we have are empty words.