

OSCE Chairperson in Office, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, H.E. Ms. Ann Linde: UK response

I would like to warmly welcome Her Excellency Ms. Ann Linde to the Permanent Council and to her new position as OSCE Chairperson in Office. The UK looks forward to working with you and your excellent team here in Vienna and in Stockholm over the course of 2021. I would also like to welcome the new Secretary General and the new heads of the autonomous institutions.

Sweden is assuming this important leadership position at a critical time for Euro-Atlantic security. An ongoing pandemic, significant challenges to human rights and fundamental freedoms, and protracted conflicts form the backdrop to our security landscape. The UK is a firm supporter of the international system – with mounting challenges, we believe steadfastly in multilateralism and the importance of international organisations such as the OSCE. We agree that it is in our collective interest to work together in tackling common challenges. We need to ensure the multilateral system emerges from 2021 and the COVID-19 pandemic stronger. We thank Sweden for taking on this important role at this crucial time.

Your priorities as set out for the OSCE chime with the UK's – focus on defending the European security order, addressing protracted conflicts and enhancing democracy and gender equality. We agree on the importance of supporting the work of the OSCE's autonomous institutions, with their strong mandates and unique strengths, and that involving civil society organisations in our work helps us live up to our OSCE commitments.

And the beating heart of the OSCE is the collection of commitments and values all 57 participating States have freely signed up to, starting from the Helsinki Final Accord in 1975. Non use of force, sovereignty, territorial integrity and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms – these are at the core of these commitment, and are ultimately what this organisation is all about. We need to work together to uphold them. In this regard, the UK will be a firm supporter throughout your Chairpersonship in defending the values and rules that keep us safe.

On human rights, fundamental freedoms and the priority of enhancing democracy – the UK will continue to work to promote those rights and uphold these principles and commitments in the OSCE area. There are a number of places where they are currently denied and where there is significant backsliding. This year is a vital one to remind ourselves of our OSCE human dimension commitments. These include the holding of democratic elections which are periodic, genuine, free and fair. They include upholding the rule of law with independent judiciaries ruling on transparent laws where everyone is treated equally. And also include the full implementation of human rights and fundamental freedoms such as the freedom from torture, the right to a fair trial, and the freedom of expression, where media freedom and the safety of

journalists are crucial. We need to remind ourselves that the hard-won gains of past decades can never be taken for granted, anywhere. We look forward to working with you, and the new heads of the autonomous institutions, on upholding these vital commitments.

We share your conviction that we must prioritise conflict resolution and agree with your assessment that the OSCE has many tools at its disposal to support these efforts.

The Trilateral Contact Group, skillfully chaired by Ambassador Grau, and the OSCE's Special Monitoring Mission, under the dedicated leadership of Ambassador Cevik, have been vital and we continue to offer them our steadfast support in addressing the impacts of the conflict in and around Ukraine. Let us be clear – this is a conflict that Russia started and continues to fuel as part of their ongoing aggression against Ukraine, which remains one of the most serious security threats to the OSCE region. We will not stop calling on Russia to end its illegal annexation of Crimea and its destabilising activities in eastern Ukraine and return to the respect for OSCE principles and commitments.

Sadly, last year provided many sombre examples of how conflicts in the OSCE region continue to blight the lives of civilians. We were deeply saddened by the tragic loss of life during the escalation of military hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and gravely concerned at the continuing human rights violations and unacceptable restrictions on freedom of movement in the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and in the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova. All these situations make clear the urgent need to ensure respect for OSCE principles and commitments, as well as to further intensify the OSCE's vital conflict resolution work. As Sweden takes on this important task, you can rely on our firm support both for you and for all the OSCE's conflict resolution formats.

As Chair of the Security Committee in 2020, I was pleased that consensus was reached on a declaration underlining the importance of implementing OSCE commitments to tackle transnational organised crime. I and the UK stand ready to continue supporting your efforts to build on this priority topic in 2021, as well as on wider priorities such as cyber security.

We welcome your focus on comprehensive security. As host of the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties next November, we recognise the importance of addressing the growing threat of long-term security challenges like climate change.

Your focus on gender equality and its importance is shared by the UK. We should be of no doubt that security – whether we are talking regional security, political security, economic security, environmental security, or human security – is enhanced by gender equality. Last year, 52 out of 57 participating States agreed to fully implement UNSCR 1325 in the OSCE area. This demonstrates the importance attached to the WPS agenda. We must do more to protect women and girls from all forms of violence, including in conflict and crisis situations. Initiatives such as the Protection Framework for women peacebuilders can help support this. And we look forward to working with you

to advance this agenda.

Your Excellency – in concluding, we wish you and your team the very best in the important year ahead in the OSCE. Please be assured of the UK's support.