

New OSCE Secretary General, H.E. Ms. Helga Schmid: UK statement

Welcome Secretary General. And thank you for your address to the Permanent Council today and for setting out so clearly your approach to the role and your priorities. You have the UK's support and confidence to deliver on this agenda.

You are no doubt already aware that the role of OSCE Secretary General is a challenging one and you are assuming this role during extremely challenging times. COVID-19 continues to impact on OSCE business and directly on the work of the Secretariat.

Although the organisation has adapted extremely well to the virtual environment within which we are all currently forced to operate, there will be aspects of OSCE business, and of your role –relationship building, diplomacy, outreach, support for conflict prevention and resolution – that really benefit from in person, face to face interaction, which I hope we can all return to soon. That said, your able team have demonstrated virtual multilateralism can work and a key priority now should be to capture all of that learning and best practice (including around reducing the organisation's environmental impact) so we do not simply return to old behaviours and practices.

Your three priorities – effective and efficient management; strengthening trust and dialogue and promoting and protecting the OSCE's comprehensive security concept across all three dimensions – which you identified during your hearing and again today are from our perspective, exactly right.

I'm pleased that you have prioritised the effective and efficient management of the organisation, working in partnership with the Heads of Institution and Field Missions, and with us, the participating States. Every effective organisation must be underpinned by robust, objective and clear financial, Human Resources, legal and oversight processes which support good governance and decision making, a safe open and inclusive working environment, merit based recruitment and efficient, results based budgeting.

It is the responsibility of all organisations to put in place appropriate, effective internal governance systems and processes to protect staff from bullying and harassment and to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse. The consequences of failing to do so are grave, both for the victims and for the reputation of the organisation. Participating states have a crucial role to play here, including through our secondment of personnel into OSCE structures. The UK remains a strong supporter of clear efforts to promote and advance gender equality, undertake tangible actions on UNSCR 1325 in the OSCE, and create a culture which values diversity within the OSCE's executive structures.

The relationship between the Secretary General and the 57 participating

States is key to organisational effectiveness. We are pleased that from the outset you have committed to regular, transparent engagement with delegations here in Vienna. And in return we should all commit to giving you and our new Heads of Institutions the space and flexibility you require to do your jobs effectively and to form your own views on organisational effectiveness, efficiencies and on any areas in need of reform.

We also recognise the importance of a strong, supportive relationship between the Secretary General and the OSCE Chair, particularly in response to emerging risks to security in the OSCE region, early warning or conflict prevention. In response to regional or internal crises, the OSCE has an impressive range of tools, guidance and support to offer but whether those tools can be deployed successfully depends on the level of trust between the participating states and OSCE structures, and the willingness of those States to accept help when it is offered.

You are right also to focus on the promotion of the OSCE's unique comprehensive security concept and the interlinkages between the three Dimensions. In your external engagement with other multilateral organisations, it will continue to be important to increase international awareness of the OSCE's role, its areas of expertise, where it can add real value, and to avoid unnecessary duplication of effort.

Congratulations once again on your appointment. We look forward to working with you and your team on all of these issues. And thank you to Ambassador Tuula Yrola for her excellent job in acting as Secretary General and Officer in Charge, during the important period at the end of last year.