

# OSCE Asian Partners meeting: Presentation by UK chair of OSCE Security Committee

Thank you, Ambassador Hasani, Ambassador Sadleir, and to Professor Medcalf for his presentation.

I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this meeting and outline the work we're doing in the Security Committee related to the issue of transnational organised crime.

Before my appointment as chair of the Security Committee, firstly in support of the Albanian Chairpersonship and now of the Swedish Chair-in-Office, the OSCE's focus on the transnational threat of organised crime had diminished somewhat. Both Albania and Sweden now have the issue among their priorities for the organisation.

Let's remember why it is a priority: on a global scale organised crime has been estimated to control anything from 2% to one quarter of global GDP. This amounts to a staggering portion of trade, investment and economic activity in the world. Across the OSCE region, organised crime continues to undermine the rule of law, to weaken the fabric of our societies and to erode public trust in governance and institutions.

It transcends borders, working through networks of organised crime groups that span countries across the OSCE region and beyond. In the UK alone, more than 4,500 organised crime groups have been identified, and those are just the ones we know about.

We are now well past the stage when the COVID-19 pandemic initially disrupted the operations of transnational organised crime groups. They have adapted and are benefitting from the crisis and its aftershocks by exploiting old and new vulnerabilities. The need to counter these groups has become more acute.

It is important to identify and address national security vulnerabilities so that they are less easily exploited by hostile actors. Every state will have its own mixture of political, institutional, economic, and social vulnerabilities that organised crime groups prey on to undermine national security. In some cases, this can lead to the effective replacement of the state in terms of local, regional or social service provisions as a means of control and exploitation.

Our collective success at the Tirana Ministerial Council with the agreement of the Declaration on Strengthening Co-operation in Countering Transnational Organized Crime gave a boost to addressing the threat. Through our work in the Security Committee, I am helping to make renewed use of the OSCE platform to implement our commitments to counter and prevent transnational organised crime and the threat it poses to our people, our societies, our institutions

and our prosperity.

Our Security Committee meetings this year are examining building effective and transparent institutions to combat and prevent transnational organised crime; the impact of organised crime within societies; preventing recruitment into organised crime groups; and new technologies in the fight against transnational organised crime.

Building and maintaining effective and transparent institutions is the cornerstone here: without them, states remain vulnerable to the full range of external threats, to the loss of trust of their citizens and potentially to state capture. Although vital in preventing, investigating and disrupting organised crime, this does not just involve law enforcement or state bodies alone.

For example, we heard in the Committee from a civil society representative on the importance of a free, independent media able to hold governments to account as well as expose corruption and political links to organised crime groups. A resilient financial and private sector is also important as are research institutions and NGOs writ large.

The challenges in building resilient institutions and societies are formidable, particularly in the wake of the pandemic. But taking an inclusive, holistic and gender-sensitive approach, working together, sharing lessons learned, and recognising the different needs and gendered, generational and socio-economic drivers that affect and influence organised crime is an important step. The OSCE platform remains important in delivering that work, here in Vienna and through the field operations, helping to build greater confidence to tackle the threat effectively and collaboratively.

Thank you again to Albania and Australia for organising this meeting and for inviting me to speak.