

Presentation by Council of Europe Secretary General to OSCE: UK response, June 2022

Thank you, Chair. Thank you Chair and thank you Secretary General Burić for your comments. At your previous appearances before the Permanent Council, the UK recalled the important longstanding relationship between the OSCE and the Council of Europe, and that the relationship is rooted firmly in the promotion of human rights, rule of law, and democracy across the continent and beyond. Respect for these common principles defines our shared endeavours in Vienna and in Strasbourg. We meet today at a particularly challenging time for European Security and while President Putin's unjustified war in Ukraine continues, we are reminded that those common principles and commitments are needed more than ever.

Madam Secretary General – what you have said today and the focus of your annual report “Moving Forward 2022” links with recent discussions at this Permanent Council. We had also believed that the death and destruction from war belonged to Europe's past. Although that vision has been shattered, we share your determination to stand in solidarity with Ukraine and to take what action we can. We welcome the Council of Europe's swift and decisive action in responding to Russia's aggression. At the OSCE, we remain committed to holding accountable those who have committed unspeakable acts, including against vulnerable groups. This is why at last week's Permanent Council, 45 participating States with Ukraine's support [invoked the Moscow Mechanism for a second time](#), triggering a further independent investigation into Russia's war crimes in Ukraine. We will continue to use the full set of tools available to hold the Russian government and members of the armed forces committing atrocities to account.

Your priorities remind us of the important role played by the Council of Europe and OSCE/ODIHR, as well as the OSCE's Representative on Freedom of the Media and others, in supporting and helping to maintain our democratic environment and institutions. The regular cooperation between the Venice Commission and ODIHR is a clear example of how shared expertise can provide high quality assessments and advice. Such advice, when heeded by OSCE participating States, can help make a practical, positive difference to individual countries and their citizens.

Like you, we agree on the importance of civil society in creating and maintaining healthy democracies. Though we note that the space for civil society is shrinking and we are also seeing threats to freedom of expression in the OSCE region. The UK believes media freedom is a cornerstone of democracy. Madam Secretary – we are deeply concerned about the case of dual British – Russian national Vladimir Kara-Murza – an opposition politician, journalist and civil society activist who is currently imprisoned in Russia. He faces charges under the new legislation that criminalises spreading so-called “false information” about the Russian armed forces –carrying a weighty

five to ten year prison sentence. His sentencing is the latest attempt by Russian authorities to shutdown opposition to their policies. We call on the Russian Federation to release Vladimir Kara-Murza.

We are strong supporters of the invaluable role played by the OSCE's Representative on Freedom of the Media. A free media is essential for holding governments to account, allowing our citizens to debate issues freely, to challenge their governments and to make informed decisions. We particularly welcome therefore your recognition of the significance of freedom of expression both online and offline for democracy, including the importance of the safety of journalists.

The Council of Europe and the OSCE share much common ground. As we face up to a series of common challenges, it is important that we continue to recognise each organisation's individual merits and distinctiveness. We need to work in a coordinated way to employ the unique set of instruments and tools which each organisation offers to its participating and member States. In light of the serious challenges we face, those tools are needed now more than ever.

The UK is, and will remain, a steadfast supporter of the work of both the Council of Europe and the OSCE. We offer you, and your staff, our best wishes for your work in the months ahead.