

UK national statement to the 2021 OSCE Ministerial Council

Thank you Foreign Minister Linde, Excellencies, friends, I am very pleased to be joining you here today. Thank you, Ann, for your leadership this year. We are looking forward as well to Zbigniew's Chairmanship.

Nearly half a century ago our predecessors gathered in Helsinki to sign the Final Act. And we made a collective pledge to peace, security and justice. We agreed a core set of principles – renouncing the use of force, respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, and protecting human rights and freedoms.

These values are universal and they apply to all our populations and all of our societies. And they remain at the heart of the OSCE – and they have the UK's full support.

What we need to see is all countries respecting these commitments. Yet some are taking an à la carte approach.

We see ongoing conflicts impacting regional stability, and devastating the lives of civilians. And we have seen freedom and democracy under attack.

What we see most of all is a lack of political will to follow through on these principles.

We fully support Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Russia's lack of transparency over its military build-up heightens tensions in the region and degrades trust. This threatening behaviour is unacceptable.

I want to be very clear: any action by Russia to undermine freedom and democracy in Ukraine – or elsewhere in the region – would be a strategic mistake.

I call on Russia to use the OSCE tools to build trust and live up to commitments on transparency.

Moreover, the OSCE's Special Monitoring Mission, and international humanitarian monitoring missions, need full, safe and unimpeded access throughout Ukraine, including in Crimea.

We are also deeply concerned by rising tensions in the Balkans. There has been hard-won peace in the Western Balkans and it must not be lost or threatened.

The UK is stepping up its political engagement. Today we appointed Sir Stuart Peach as Special Envoy for the Western Balkans, and we are working with the High Representative and colleagues including the United States and the EU.

Attempts to destabilise peace and stability of the Western Balkans are

unacceptable and we call on everyone to respect freedom and democracy in the region.

The reality is, in other areas, civilians' lives need to be protected and regional stability preserved.

In Georgia, in Moldova, we continue to have human rights concerns. In both of these cases, we support the OSCE's efforts towards conflict prevention, resolution and reconciliation.

In Afghanistan, we need to work together to stop the country becoming a hotbed of terrorism and falling into humanitarian disrepair.

We also need to push back on attacks on human rights and democracy in Belarus, in particular the weaponisation of migration.

The Belarussian people continue to suffer, and we want to see a true national dialogue, through the OSCE, to resolve the crisis.

Elections are a key part of the OSCE's work, and we support an impartial, facts-based approach to the OSCE in observing elections.

A thriving civil society makes all of us safer and more secure.

Ultimately, we want a world where freedom and democracy don't just survive – they thrive.

To achieve that and support the region's safety and security, we have to stick to our commitments.

The values and principles enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act and subsequent OSCE agreements provide a roadmap for a safe, secure environment for all our citizens.

And I hope all of the participating States here today will have the confidence and the political will to uphold them.