

UK Statement in Response to OSCE Chair in Office, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland, H.E. Mr Zbigniew Rau

Thank you Minister Rau and welcome to Vienna. On behalf of the United Kingdom I would like to congratulate you on Poland's Chairmanship and offer you our full support in the year ahead. We look forward to working with you and your excellent team here in Vienna and in Warsaw over the course of 2022.

Poland 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, protracted conflicts and heightened tensions form the backdrop to our security landscape. Above all, the unprovoked and unjustified build-up of Russian forces around Ukraine.

You have set out clearly the task which we have ahead of us. I have said the task we have ahead of us as it is clear that all participating States at the OSCE have an important role to play. We must all defend robustly the principles and commitments to which we freely signed up and which are the bedrock of our shared security. Non use of force, sovereignty, territorial integrity and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms – these are ultimately what the OSCE is all about. We need to work together to uphold them and we are ready for meaningful dialogue which must be based on the core principles and foundational documents of European Security.

We support your approach for the OSCE to be used as a platform for discussions on European security. It is an appropriate and inclusive platform. We must defend the principle that there should be no discussions about security without the countries concerned being present. The OSCE brings us together as 57 participating States from North America to Mongolia and from the Arctic Circle down to the Mediterranean, Caucasus and Central Asia. We have shared interests and the OSCE has a firm foundation, including through its range of mechanisms and instruments to address the challenges we face. We believe that we should move forward in a timely fashion in reinvigorating the debate on European security and will be happy to feed in thoughts.

The peaceful settlement of conflicts in Europe will further contribute to stability in Europe. We are determined to support Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity in the face of Russia's threatening behaviour. Russia must uphold the commitments it signed up to freely, namely The Helsinki Final Act and the Minsk Protocols, as well as the Budapest Memorandum, guaranteeing to "respect the independence and sovereignty and the borders of Ukraine". Russia must deescalate the situation along the border and withdraw its forces from the territory of Ukraine. We continue to call on Russia to end its illegal annexation of Crimea and its destabilising activities in eastern Ukraine and uphold their OSCE principles and commitments. This includes in military transparency.

Sadly there are places within the OSCE region where conflict continues. As you said, Minister Rau, we need to be mindful of the humanitarian impact and that civilians' lives need to be protected and regional stability not placed at risk. In Georgia, civilians continue to be denied free movement in the Georgian breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Ceasefire violations following last year's Nagorno-Karabakh conflict sadly continue to lead to civilian casualties. We encourage all parties to work with the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs to deliver a peaceful and sustainable settlement to the conflict. In Moldova, we see people's lives being disrupted, and human rights concerns in the Transnistrian region. We support the OSCE's efforts and conflict prevention, resolution and reconciliation structures in all the above cases.

As you mention, your Excellency, our security remains indivisible. The OSCE is the forum for discussing security concerns with and between all 57 participating States. Each participating State has an equal right to security and is free to choose or change its security arrangements. There should be no spheres of influence.

The principle of cross-dimensional approach to security also remains at the heart of our OSCE commitments. How we support our democratic institutions, including through ensuring the freedom of the media and the monitoring of elections, and the full implementation of human rights and fundamental freedoms are key aspects of that approach. We need to remind ourselves that the hard-won gains of past decades can never be taken for granted, anywhere.

Finally, we support your ambition for adoption of the unified budget. The OSCE's Unified Budget is essential to enable a smooth operation. Alongside the OSCE's Secretariat, the OSCE's autonomous institutions and field missions undertake excellent work to support implementation of our collective OSCE principles and commitments. They need to be adequately financed in order to achieve this role. We particularly underline the need for ODIHR to have sufficient funding to carry out its elections work and other activities in support of participating States.

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 and we stand ready to play our part and to enter into discussions in good faith.

Thank you.