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The Rt Hon David Lidington MP

Minister for Europe

UK Intervention at the OSCE Ministerial Council, Kyiv

Thursday 5th December 2013

(As delivered)

Thank you, Mr Chairman.

I would like to thank our Ukrainian hosts, for their hospitality this week in Kyiv, and for all their hard work throughout their Chairmanship. Giving direction to an organisation of the OSCE's size is no easy task, but we have appreciated your even-handed approach. The OSCE remains the world's largest regional security organisation, and the United Kingdom remains committed to working with all participating States to strengthen security across our region. For all countries represented here today, the notion of security goes far beyond the absence of war. It's about creating a framework for peace and stability – with democracy and human rights - the Human Dimension - at its core.

As we meet in Kyiv, the people of Ukraine are facing their own challenges, demonstrating the importance of the Human Dimension. Over the past few days many hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians have taken to the streets to express their views on Ukraine's future following their government's decision to put preparations for signature of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement on hold. As the Prime Minister of Ukraine said earlier, in a democracy such peaceful protests should be seen as a normal part of life. I was deeply concerned by reports of violence being used to break up a peaceful demonstration. I welcome the Ukrainian authorities' commitment to a thorough investigation. It is of the utmost importance that this investigation is seen to be rigorous and fair. It is of additional concern to hear

reports of so many practising journalists who have sustained injuries inflicted by law enforcement officers during the events of the last few days. I continue to urge the Ukrainian authorities to respect the rights of the citizens of Ukraine to peaceful protest, freedom of assembly and freedom of association. It is essential that all parties remain calm and avoid actions that could cause the situation to escalate or restrict personal freedoms. The eyes of the world are on Ukraine now, and that will continue to be the case after the close of this Ministerial meeting. A heavy responsibility lies on the Ukrainian government, as Chairman-in-Office of this organisation, to demonstrate, through its actions as well as its words, its enduring commitment to OSCE values. It is incumbent upon every participating State to do so.

Within the OSCE we have outstanding institutions in the form of ODIHR, the Representative on Freedom of the Media and the High Commissioner on National Minorities to help us turn words into action. To ensure that we all live up to and fully implement the commitments we have all agreed to. But they cannot do it alone. The commitments we make here are only meaningful; can only truly benefit our citizens; can only protect the rights of minorities around the world, if we, the participating States, demonstrate the political will to make them happen.

I therefore welcome the agreement on two decisions in the human dimension, including on Freedom of Thought, Conscience, Religion or Belief, a priority for the United Kingdom.

Of course, no country is perfect and every one of us can improve. But I regret to say that some states appear determined not just to ignore their commitments, but to allow narrow national interest to undermine and weaken them.

For example, the OSCE has long been at the forefront of regional efforts on arms control, but we continue to find progress on negotiations on Small Arms and Light Weapons blocked.

Similarly, action to counter the threat of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons – which hung so heavily over the continent for half a century has stalled. The evidence of the regional value the OSCE can add to work on UNSCR 1540, under a global UN lead, is overwhelming.

We need to update and modernise the Vienna Document, yet there is a lack of political will to act decisively on that despite its importance.

And again, a narrow interpretation of national interests seems to be blocking progress towards an OSCE Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. My colleague, Foreign Secretary William Hague, has worked tirelessly to build a global coalition to prevent sexual violence in conflict, and end the culture of impunity. We have secured significant agreements in the G8 and UN Security Council this year. So, I urge all OSCE states and partners to support both this important cause and the OSCE Action Plan.

Finally, while measures to improve the OSCE's capability to diffuse tensions - such as the incoming Swiss Chairmanship's focus on strengthening mediation capacity – are most welcome. All member states should renew our efforts to make progress on protracted conflicts in Nagorno Karabakh, Georgia and Transnistria. We do recognise the challenges but urge those involved to find the political will to take real steps to improve the lives of the people in our region, too many in number, whose lives continue to be affected by conflict and its aftermath.

I say this because these are wasted opportunities to tackle some of the biggest challenges we face. And the OSCE has shown, in so many areas, that, when we are willing to act together, we can advance the interests of all our citizens.

For example, this year we saw the first internationally recognised confidence building measures in cyber security, something that the United Kingdom has strongly advocated since the London cyber conference in 2011, and which I believe all states should warmly welcome.

The OSCE can make a positive contribution too to wider international efforts to curb transnational threats. We hope to see agreement on a declaration on Afghanistan that underscores the organisation's capacity to act on issues like border security in the Central Asian context.

But nowhere is the OSCE's dual commitment to improving the lives of our citizens

and promoting our shared values more visible than in its network of field missions. Supporting democracy and promoting stability in some of the Organisation's remotest regions, but in doing so, making all of its members more secure. Although support for elections in Kosovo is a notable and successful recent example, there is also much less visible but equally important work going on in OSCE offices from Albania to Uzbekistan. We encourage all governments who host OSCE missions to make the most of what they can offer and, in that context, we welcome Mongolia's constructive approach to their first year of OSCE membership and their interest in hosting a presence. We look forward to discussing proposals for that shortly.

If field missions are to retain their impact, they must be properly mandated and effectively resourced. But economic conditions remain challenging and our taxpayers want to see efficient and prudent spending. No international organisation can be immune to this fiscal scrutiny. We must prove that the OSCE provides value for money and we welcome the work already in hand to increase a culture of evaluation across this organisation.

We should use the Helsinki plus 40 process to improve the effectiveness of the OSCE. It could open up new ways to build the Security Community envisaged at Astana, but only if we - all of us here - are prepared to seize the opportunity.

I thank our Ukrainian colleagues once again for all the important work they have done during the course of 2013. And I look forward to continuing this collaborative approach under the Swiss Chairmanship. The joint work plan they and Serbia proposed is a realistic agenda for helping us to deliver progress over the coming years, and I call upon all OSCE states to join us in supporting them.

We have shown in the past that, through our political will, this organisation can fundamentally improve the security and prosperity of all our people: from reducing tensions between groups in a community; to instilling confidence in voters that elections are free and fair, and their vote will count.

From defending independent voices in our media and societies, to improving water supplies and infrastructure in communities affected by conflict, the OSCE has an incredible capacity to do good.

To ensure full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms...

To ensure that the rule of law is upheld...

To promote the principles of democracy and tolerance by building, strengthening and protecting democratic institutions;

And, in doing so, it makes us all safer.

But we can and should do more. I remain confident we have the mandate from our peoples and the ability to do that in the months and years to come. But only if we choose, both together and individually, to show the necessary will.

Thank you.