



**Statement by H.E. Mr. Stef Blok,
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands,
at the 27th Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council
3 December 2020**

Mr Chairman,

Thank you for giving me the floor. I regret that we are not able to join you in Tirana, but I commend you for organising our Ministerial Council so professionally, despite the challenging circumstances. I fully support the EU-statement pronounced a few moments ago. In addition, I would like to make the following points.

When we last met a year ago, the coronavirus had not yet broken out. Since then, with the help of technology, we have managed to change the way we meet. But there are other developments that can not be solved with technology, conflicts that flared up and require dialogue and political will to resolve.

Not for the first time Europe- our neighbourhood - is in turmoil. In this light, the importance of the OSCE as honest broker and mediator can hardly be overstated. It provides a platform for dialogue, and all participating States must allow the Organisation to perform its functions.

My government is very disappointed that the Belarusian authorities have declined the offer of the current and incoming Chairman-in-Office to facilitate a broad national dialogue. I met with Svetlana Tichanovskaya recently and I know that the opposition is willing to engage in such a dialogue.

I call on the authorities to cease the violence against peaceful protesters and to make use of the good offices of the OSCE to seek a peaceful solution.

My country was among those that invoked the Moscow Mechanism in response to the situation in Belarus. We thank Professor Benedek for his report, which contains very forceful conclusions and recommendations. We regret that the Belarussian authorities refused to cooperate with the rapporteur and we urge them to heed the recommendations, since they provide a roadmap out of this crisis. And that is exactly what is needed.

While we welcome the cessation of hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh, we need to look into the option of an independent inquiry to establish the truth and whether any war crimes or human rights violations have been perpetrated, and if illegal weapons like cluster munitions and incendiary weapons were used, as well as the deployment of foreign fighters.

The Netherlands continues to actively support the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs, who are uniquely positioned to assist in further negotiations on a sustainable and peaceful solution to the conflict, which is in the interest of all OSCE states. Therefore it is crucial that all OSCE participating States take their responsibility in this process, which is not just a matter of concern to those that are currently deploying personnel on the ground. In this regard, we call for a role for the OSCE in the international monitoring of the ceasefire.

Finally, the Netherlands reiterates the importance of maintaining the arms embargo that the OSCE has called for since 1992, in order not to jeopardize the ceasefire.

We welcome the ceasefire in Ukraine and small steps taken to alleviate the burden on the civilian population. We reiterate our unwavering support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, and we call on all parties to step up efforts towards a political solution on the basis of the Minsk-agreements. We underline the essential role the Special Monitoring Mission continues to play in Ukraine.

The upheaval in various parts of our continent also illustrates the need for reinvigorated arms control. We therefore call on the Russian Federation to engage constructively on the package of Vienna Document modernisation proposals, which already enjoys the support of 34 countries, a clear majority of participating States.

We thank Spain for chairing the Structured Dialogue this year, and we look forward to continuing our participation in this important forum and its efforts to advance the debate on new avenues for arms control.

The Human Dimension is an integral part of our comprehensive security. Respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law are necessary preconditions for a vibrant and safe society, a society where civic organisations and free media can fully and independently contribute to an open debate. It is our duty to protect them.

The OSCE plays an important role in this regard. Not only by setting standards that are binding on all 57 participating States but also by providing a platform for a free exchange of views between our citizens and governments. It is regrettable that COVID-19 prevented the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting from taking place this year. The HDIM is the most important annual event in the Third Dimension and we stand firm that it must go ahead next year.

The autonomous institutions, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the Representative on Freedom of the Media, and the High Commissioner on National Minorities are indispensable parts of the OSCE. Together with the missions and offices in the field, they form our link with the people we serve, our citizens. It is therefore crucial that we preserve and support them, and provide them with the means to carry out their mandates.

The positions of the Heads of Institutions have been vacant since mid-July. This is obviously an undesirable situation. My delegation therefore commends your efforts, Mr Chairman, and welcomes consensus on the appointment of four new candidates. We look forward to working with all four, but allow me to especially welcome the new High Commissioner on National Minorities to The Hague. We remain proud to host this important member of the OSCE family.

Mr Chairman,

The OSCE has never been a fair weather organization. It has proven its worth both in good times and in bad. I call on all participating States to make full use of it and to allow the OSCE to display its full potential. This is our shared responsibility, and our commitment is needed now more than ever before.

In closing, I thank you for your leadership during this turbulent year and I wish Sweden success as Chairperson-in-Office in 2021.

Thank you