

## **OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL, VILNIUS, 6-7 DECEMBER 2011**

### **UK STATEMENT BY MR DAVID LIDINGTON, MINISTER FOR EUROPE**

Thank you, Mr Chairman,

I am delighted to be invited to speak on behalf of the United Kingdom at this 18<sup>th</sup> OSCE Ministerial Council. May I join previous speakers in thanking our Lithuanian colleague for his country's excellent hospitality and to congratulate Foreign Minister Ažubalis and his Team for all their hard work throughout the Lithuanian Chairmanship-in-Office. The UK remains committed to the core aims of this organisation, and applauds the diligence and transparency with which our Lithuanian colleagues have pursued this challenging agenda, to protect and promote the OSCE's work in 2011.

Last year in Astana we were close to agreeing an ambitious framework for action to enable the OSCE to develop a true security community, one where the use of force amongst participating States is unthinkable. We therefore particularly welcome the Chairmanship's efforts to take forward that timely and useful work in Astana. The time is ripe to take some concrete steps to strengthen OSCE capabilities in the conflict cycle, to update freedom of the media, and to enable journalists to carry out work vital to functioning democracies without fear of violence or intimidation.

2011 has also seen the appointment of a new OSCE Secretary-General, Lamberto Zannier: we welcome his appointment. This year, we have faced a climate of great change and challenge, from the political upheavals of the Arab Spring to the ongoing regional and global economic conditions which affect us all. We commend the new Secretary-General for starting his delicate task of reforming the organisation, including by preparing the Secretariat for the economic and administrative challenges ahead. The OSCE budget for 2012 needs to take full account of the wider realities we are all facing. Doing more with less is a fact of life in the public sectors of many participating States. International organisations are not immune from this.

In such volatile political and economic times, we pay tribute to the OSCE Institutions and Field Missions whose work, often in difficult conditions, adds so much to our organisation. All relevant Departments of the United Kingdom Administration work closely with OSCE bodies across the whole range of their work. This year we were particularly pleased to receive the ODIHR report on the May 2010 United Kingdom election. As always, ODIHR came up with some helpful conclusions to be taken on board: proof that ODIHR works cooperatively and impartially with all participating States, and that all of us can benefit and learn from their independent expertise.

It was regrettable that in 2011 a group of participating States had to invoke the Moscow Mechanism in respect of Belarus. Almost one year after the flawed elections (19.12.10) and the political crackdown, the situation in Belarus continues to deteriorate and another political prisoner has been convicted in another flawed trial. He was punished because he sought to assist other political prisoners. We hope that 2012 will see Belarus demonstrating its commitment to the principles of the OSCE by addressing the issues raised in the report by the Moscow Mechanism rapporteur.

In this organisation progress can be slow, but we need to remain optimistic and energetic in our pursuit of progress, so that change for the better can be achieved, even when we do not see immediate results. We are encouraged by signs this year of possible progress in the protracted conflict in Moldova/Transnistria. We urge all those engaged in protracted conflicts to continue to work in a positive and constructive spirit of openness, no matter how big the challenge.

The UK remains fully committed to a functioning conventional arms control regime in Europe. We recognise there are major hurdles to be overcome and that resolving our differences will not be quick or easy. A strong commitment to legally-binding ceilings for our armaments, and to transparency with respect to their location, is a foundation for the long term security of Europe. Complementing these arms control elements, the newly reissued Vienna Document takes the first small step in bringing this key tool for building confidence, security and stability back into full relevance. The United Kingdom looks forward to engaging positively in future, more substantial, work on Vienna Document.

To stay relevant and effective the OSCE must also respond to new and emerging security challenges. At the international London Conference on Cyberspace, there was agreement that the international community needed to focus on practical steps to prevent or mitigate potential problems between states on cyber issues. The OSCE work on Confidence Building Measures was seen as a key element of this further work and I welcome proposals to take forward these conclusions through setting up an informal working group.

We remain deeply concerned about the harassment, intimidation and murder of journalists in some participating States. Attacks on the media are attacks on democracy. A free media is also essential as a driver of economic growth. Investors look to establish themselves in countries where there is a free media so they have unhindered access to reliable and credible sources of information, which in turn allow them to make informed decisions. We call on all participating States to honour their existing obligations and to extend their undertakings, including by taking account of technological developments to ensure that the Internet and other forms of digital media remain free.

It is timely to congratulate Germany on the successful holding of the Bonn Conference, and to welcome its outcomes which confirmed the International Community long term commitment to future stability and security of Afghanistan. We look forward to building on the commitments agreed at Bonn, and I encourage the OSCE in its efforts to review what further complementary contributions it can make.

Finally, renewing my tribute to our Lithuanian colleagues' efforts this year, I extend our best wishes and promise of full cooperation to our Irish colleagues, as they prepare to assume the Chairmanship in Office in 2012. One issue on which the Irish Chairmanship will lead us is consideration of Mongolia's application to join the OSCE. It surely speaks volumes for this organisation and its work that there are more countries wishing to join our ranks. We hope we can move this question forward over 2012. More generally, we note that our Irish colleagues already have in place plans for an ambitious, but realistic agenda. We call on all participating States to support fully their important programme for next year, to advance the essential work in which we are all engaged within this organisation.

Thank you.