

Presentation by Chairperson-in-Office and Swedish Foreign Minister Ann Linde on Sweden's Chairpersonship programme and priorities for the OSCE to its Permanent Council in Vienna on Thursday, 14 January 2021 (check against delivery)

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Dear Colleagues.

It is an honour to officially launch the Swedish Chairpersonship of the OSCE, 28 years after we last held this role. The situation in Europe today is very different from that faced by our region in the 1990s. New conflicts, crises and threats have emerged – from climate change to cyber security and pandemics. The importance of our organisation and our commitments does, however, remain intact.

In a situation where multilateral cooperation and international law are increasingly being challenged, and our agreements and instruments to strengthen security are being questioned, we need to remind ourselves why we designed them in the first place.

Sweden is convinced that multilateral cooperation is the best way to address our common challenges. Sweden has shown that we are ready to shoulder our responsibility for the multilateral system before.

The experiences from our time on the UN Security Council show that, through dedicated diplomacy, it is possible to make a difference. It is with this mindset and experience that we take on the task of leading the OSCE for the coming year.

Through the shared commitments on which the OSCE was founded, the link between security and respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law is crystal clear. Together we have declared all OSCE principles and commitments to be matters of immediate and legitimate concern to all participating States. By holding each other accountable, we make sure that our commitments remain relevant. By honouring our commitments, we make sure that our region is safe. This is where the unique value of our organisation lies.

During the coming year, I will do my part to ensure that the OSCE can make a real difference on the ground and to defend the principles on which our organisation was founded. I will do this as an honest broker, representing all participating States. I will work to support discussions and measures that can lead to sustainable conflict resolution. But being an honest broker also means that I will not shy away from pointing out violations of our commonly agreed principles.

Ultimately, our priorities aim to contribute to resolving the conflicts in our region. Threats to international peace and security, as well as the suffering caused by conflicts, are simply unacceptable. We therefore need to keep the resolution of the conflicts in our region at the top of our agenda.

Excellencies,

My first priority as Chairperson-in-Office will be to focus on our common principles and joint commitments. The Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris For a New Europe constitute the foundation of **the European security order**. They contain the elements we need to resolve conflicts and avoid future crises. Upholding these commitments is our shared responsibility and should be in the interests of all OSCE participating States. Underpinning the Helsinki Final Act and the Paris Charter are, of course, international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

As Chairperson-in-Office, I will also prioritise upholding the **OSCE concept of comprehensive security**. Political and economic security, human rights, democracy, the rule of law and equality are interrelated and interconnected. The notion that security depends on issues that are broader than 'hard security' is as powerful as it is simple.

We know that states that implement human rights commitments and respect democratic principles are more secure and able to provide better economic prospects and living conditions for their citizens.

The OSCE has unique instruments to support participating States in living up to our commitments. **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 – each have clear and strong mandates. I am grateful to the Albanian Chair for successfully managing the process of appointing new executive leaderships for these institutions. I would like to point out that our work as Chair will be carried out in support of, and complementary to, the work of these institutions.

The conflict cycle, devised and decided by all of us ten years ago, remains as relevant as ever and we will seek to utilise it in our efforts to resolve and prevent conflicts and crises. The important Confidence and Security Building Measures linked to the OSCE are under increasing pressure. We will support the FSC chairs to ensure their continued functioning and relevance.

When crises erupt despite our efforts to prevent them, I will remain ready to engage directly with the stakeholders involved to offer the OSCE's good offices to facilitate solutions. I will also make good use of the troika format, to ensure political continuity. In line with this, the offer extended by Prime Minister Rama as CiO and I extend last year to facilitate a genuine dialogue between the government and opposition in Belarus last year still stands, should the conditions for such talks materialise.

Excellencies,

Comprehensive security can only be achieved if everyone in our populations is included. As CiO, I will also focus on **strengthening gender equality** in all aspects of the organisation's work. In line with this, we will seek to strengthen women's economic empowerment. If this can be achieved, we will not only see stronger economic development across our region, but women will increasingly enjoy full human rights.

The economic empowerment of women is a key aspect of viable societies, just as the meaningful inclusion of women in conflict-resolution efforts strengthens the prospects for sustainable peace. This is fully in line with UN Security Council resolution 1325 and the agenda for women, peace and security, which will also be important priorities of our term as Chair.

Democracy needs to be defended consistently. As I recalled in response to events in Washington last week, we all need to stand up for our democratic principles.

Our joint commitment to **civil society participation** in the OSCE is strong and unique. Safeguarding this will be a priority for me as Chairperson-in-Office. The voices of civil society are beneficial to participating States and to the organisation as they help us implement our joint commitments. The perspectives and contributions of civil society are valuable in the work of all three dimensions and bring added value to exchanges within the OSCE.

The OSCE's presence on the ground through field missions is another crucial way it contributes to conflict resolution and improving security and democratic conditions for the people in our region. As CiO, I plan to visit as many of the field offices and missions as possible, the pandemic permitting. I will want to follow up their work to strengthen gender equality and the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda, increasing women's meaningful participation in conflict resolution efforts.

Excellencies,

Contributing to and supporting **conflict resolution** is a strong priority for the Swedish term as Chair. Last year's outbreak of armed conflict in and around Nagorno-Karabakh, its heavy death toll and human suffering made abundantly clear the risks inherent when conflicts remain unresolved. In this case, the OSCE has a vital role to play in conflict settlement, including on the ground.. The Minsk Group Co-Chairs and the Personal Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office have our full support.

The most blatant example of violations of our common commitments and of international law remains the **crisis in and around Ukraine**. As Chair, Sweden recognises the vital importance of the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine and will seek to contribute to the ongoing efforts in the Normandy Format and the Trilateral Contact Group to find a sustainable political solution to the conflict. This must be done in line with OSCE principles and commitments, in full respect of the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders, **including the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol**.

We will continue to reaffirm strongly that the SMM is mandated to have safe and secure access without restrictions throughout Ukraine and recall that the SMM must be provided with the conditions necessary for the implementation of its mandate. Already next week, I will travel to Ukraine to meet with Ukrainian officials as well as with Special Representative Grau, the SMM and the PCU to assess the situation and support the efforts for sustainable conflict resolution.

As with Ukraine, we will play an active role in the Geneva International Discussions and the related Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism regarding **Georgia**. We will also act in support of the Transnistrian Settlement Process. Here too, the Special Representative will play a key role, as will the OSCE Mission to **Moldova**. Unfortunately, an OSCE field presence has not been possible in Georgia for over ten years.

In all conflicts, we will call for respect for international law, including international humanitarian law. We will back measures to mitigate the humanitarian consequences and advocate an inclusive approach.

Excellencies,

We have lived through an extraordinarily difficult year, with the **COVID-19 pandemic** affecting all our countries as well as international cooperation, in general. Although vaccines are now being distributed and there is light at the end of the tunnel, we are still facing a challenging time over the coming months.

I am grateful to Albania for its leadership in finding solutions to keeping the fundamental tasks of the OSCE functional, even during this situation. We will build on their efforts to ensure that the OSCE continues to deliver both political accountability – through the work of our delegations, the secretariat and the institutions – and assistance to participating States through the crucial role of the OSCE field missions and autonomous institutions.

I hope that activities will be able to gradually return to normal during the year. In December, I look forward to welcoming your ministers to the Ministerial Council in Stockholm. As was shown by the successful Ministerial Council meeting in Tirana, crisis can also spur innovation. Some of the new ways of working that were introduced by the Albanian Chair will also inspire us to conduct an efficient and successful meeting.

The OSCE is only as effective as we, the participating States, allow it to be. Too often, important decisions are blocked by the opposition of a few. The negotiations for the Unified Budget is one such example that has an impact on the ability of the whole organisation to deliver on its mandate. We stand ready to do our part in leading the negotiations, and I urge all of you to engage constructively.

Excellencies,

I am under no illusions that progress will be easy or that I, as Chairperson-in-Office, will be able to bridge all the gaps that exist in our organisation. My role as Chairperson-in-Office will be to support and facilitate steps that can increase trust and security. In doing so, I will leave no stone unturned.

In the end, it is about our commitments, our security and our OSCE.

Thank you.