

Address by H.E. Ann Linde, OSCE Chairperson-in-Office  
Closing Session, OSCE Ministerial Council Meeting in Stockholm

3 December 2021

Excellencies, dear colleagues, friends,

The 2021 Ministerial Council is drawing to its close.

I am grateful to all 57 participating States and all the other participants for the frank discussions we have had on the security challenges facing our region.

This year, the high-level participation matched or even surpassed many previous Ministerial Councils – a clear sign of the importance we all attach to this organisation.

What makes the OSCE Ministerial Council unique is that discussions taking place here are not only reflections of today's political leader's priorities. They are guided by strong commitments that bind us all together in a community of comprehensive security.

As you know, Sweden has pursued three main priorities during our time as chair. We have sought to:

- Defend the European security order.
- Uphold the concept of comprehensive security, with focus on the respect for fundamental rights and freedoms, including gender equality.
- And we have sought to contribute to conflict resolution in line with our commitments and principles and international law.

We also knew that we needed to be prepared to manage crises that could not be foreseen beforehand, of which there have been several this year.

During the year I have visited around 20 participating States and met with all OSCE field presences to support these priorities.

I have seen first-hand the essential contribution that our organisation makes to improve the lives of the people affected by conflict in our region, for instance in supporting the freedom of movement for people in the non-government controlled areas in Ukraine.

In all my visits, I have prioritised meeting representatives of civil society to support their work for democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights and to get the grass root perspective of the questions dealt with by our organization.

My Special representatives – on the conflicts as well as on thematic issues – have worked tirelessly on my behalf to fulfil the role of the OSCE in the face of today's challenges. I want to extend particular thanks to all of them.

Excellencies,

Our priorities were chosen as these are the areas where the biggest challenges to European security lie.

Over the course of this year, we have seen how violations of our commitments have continued to challenge the foundation on which the OSCE is built. As Chair we have worked to ensure respect for the commitments and accountability when they are breached.

The fundamental ingredient of trust that I mentioned in my opening address of this meeting, has continued to be eroded.

This is especially clear when it comes to the conflicts in our region. The notion of some that they are “frozen” is clearly wrong. The OSCE’s engagement is needed more than ever.

This holds true in eastern Ukraine where civilians continue to fall victim of the armed violence at the contact line, a line which continues to separate hundreds of thousands from their friends and families [and limits their access to basic services].

In the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the ceasefire remains fragile and recent incidents demonstrate the need to address outstanding issues.

It is also true for Georgia and Moldova where the unresolved conflicts continue to violate fundamental principles and affect the lives of people.

The crisis in Belarus after the fraudulent presidential elections in 2020 is another example. As you all know, the OSCE stands ready to support Belarus in living up to its commitments, should it be invited to do so.

We have also seen how ODIHR has been hindered in performing its role to support participating States living up to commitments on democracy and human rights, due to limitations imposed by authorities on election observation. This is deeply problematic and in violation with our common commitments.

The rapid developments in Afghanistan this summer and the far reaching and acute challenge they pose to security also in the OSCE region provide new challenges for this organisation.

Excellencies,

Although these examples show the continued relevance and need for the OSCE, it must also be restated that our organisation can only be as effective as we, the participating States, allow it to be.

During the year, I have repeatedly seen how the consensus principle – originally the source of strength of our organisation – has been misused. Individual participating States have put their national agendas before our organisation.

The unified budget, the Annual Security Review Conference, and HDIM have all been severely affected by this during the year. As Chairperson, this is something that I deeply regret.

Next year, each and every one of us has a responsibility to ensure that the HDIM can be held.

Excellencies,

Given these severe challenges it would be easy to lose hope. But where urgent challenges have arisen, the OSCE has also been able to respond and live up to its potential:

- The SMM continues to play an important part in conflict management by monitoring the security situation and facilitating the functioning of critical civilian infrastructure in eastern Ukraine. Without its contribution I am certain that the civilian suffering would have been even worse.
- The instruments of the OSCE have been used to counter the negative development in the human dimension, where the Moscow and Vienna mechanisms have been activated in accordance with our agreements.

The Human Dimension Seminar could be held for the first time in four years, and for the very first time on the topic of Preventing and combatting violence against wo

- The work of the OSCE on combatting intolerance and discrimination has been strong this year. It was an honour to start this year with a seminar on fighting antisemitism with Rabbi Baker. I am also grateful to the Special Representatives Polak and Pacaci for their stalwart work.
- In political and military dimension, the Vienna Document was activated to seek clarity on Russian troop movements in and around Ukraine.
- Throughout the year, we have pushed hard to ensure that gender equality is part of all OSCE's activities, by asking the field presences and special and personal representatives to act and report specifically on the issue. Our efforts have ensured that gender equality will remain central to the OSCE also for the years to come.
- An advisory group on the agenda for Women, Peace and Security has been launched to support the Chair. And I am happy to say that we have taken steps as an organization towards implementing UNSC resolution 1325 better.
- Regarding Afghanistan, we have been able to come together to launch a framework and a financing mechanism to assist participating States in managing the challenges that developments in Afghanistan mean for the OSCE region.
- And although consensus is hard to achieve, this meeting has been able to decide on the chairpersonship in 2025.

These results show the continued relevance of the OSCE and how political engagement can contribute to resolution of our most difficult challenges. The key is trust – trust built on adherence and accountability towards our common commitments.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic support of the OSCE Secretariat under the strong leadership of our Secretary-General Helga Schmid. My warm thanks to you and your team, Helga, for all your commitment, hard work, and your assistance to the Chair.

Excellencies,

By our consistent focus on our priorities, I am proud to have contributed to security in our region and to the work of coming Chairs.

I am happy to hand over the chairpersonship baton to my dear colleague Zbigniew [Rau] at the end of the year. I know that the OSCE will be in safe hands given our shared views on many of the challenges that our region face.

As member of the troika, Sweden will support the Polish efforts for a more secure Europe – built on the foundation of our common commitments.

A final word of thanks goes to all those who have made this Ministerial possible – Ambassador Funered and her team in Vienna, Ambassador Lärke and the Task force and broader Swedish team in Stockholm and in your capitals. Here at XPO to our interpreters. And to all those behind the scenes without whom our meeting could not have taken place.

Thank you!