



**National Statement by Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs,**

**H.E. Tobias Billström**

**at the 30<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Council Meeting in Skopje**

**30 November 2023**

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Thank you,

While fully aligning with the statement of the EU, I make the following remarks in my national capacity.

I thank Minister Osmani and his team for ceaseless efforts to find solutions to the pressing institutional challenges. I also express my gratitude to Secretary General Schmid, the Heads of Institutions, the Parliamentary Assembly and OSCE staff for their dedicated work.

I thank Malta for accepting the responsibility as Chair for 2024 at a crucial moment for our organisation and European security. You can expect our full support.



I also thank Estonia for standing by its candidature and the principles on which the OSCE is built. We remain convinced that Estonia will make an excellent future Chair.

Excellencies,

The European Security Order - based on international law, including the UN Charter, as well as the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris - provides a blueprint to security for all participating States. It is under attack – but it is as valid as ever, and Sweden remain as determined as ever to protect it.

At the core of the European Security Order is the right of every European state to choose its own security arrangements. By applying for NATO membership, Sweden has exercised this invaluable right.

Russia's unjustified and unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine is a flagrant violation of international law, and of OSCE principles and commitments that we have all signed up to.



The war of aggression – for which Russia bears full responsibility – continues to cause immense suffering for Ukraine and its people, and puts our common security in an extremely grave situation.

We repeat our demand on Russia to stop its aggression, and completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its forces and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders.

We also call on Belarus, to stop aiding and assisting Russia in its aggression.

Excellencies,

Ukraine is not only fighting for its own freedom, but for the security and values of Europe. Our support to Ukraine is crucial. The European Commission's recommendation to open EU membership negotiations recognises the impressive reform efforts made by Ukraine, despite the ongoing war of aggression.

Lasting peace and security require accountability for all crimes committed in and against Ukraine, including for the crime of aggression. Impunity is not an option; Russia will be held to account.



The OSCE is contributing to accountability efforts, including through ODIHR's monitoring activities, its open approach to civil society and the Moscow Mechanism reports.

These show an indisputable link between internal repression in Russia and Belarus and their external aggression against Ukraine.

We call on the Belarusian regime to end its repression, release all political prisoners and detainees immediately and unconditionally, to respect media freedom and civil society, and start an inclusive national dialogue.

We similarly call on Russia to abide by international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law as well as its OSCE human dimension commitments.

The loud and clear message from the parallel civil society conference here in Skopje confirms the growing authoritarianism and increased human rights violations and abuses in parts of our region. Here, the OSCE autonomous institutions play an invaluable role. Sweden strongly supports an extension of the mandates of the current Heads of Institutions and the Secretary General beyond 2023 in an equal manner.



Excellencies,

We must also not forget how Russia is extending its malign influence on other participating States. I reiterate our support to Moldova and Georgia to strengthen their resilience, security, restoration of their territory as well as their EU integration paths.

We are also closely following developments in Nagorno-Karabakh. Humanitarian support for refugees and safe return for those who wish to come back must be ensured. We encourage Armenia and Azerbaijan to continue the EU facilitated dialogue.

Excellencies,

The OSCE offers a valuable platform to address multiple crises of our region based on its founding principles and international law. Sweden will stay committed and do its part.

I thank you.