

ASRC special session on Ukraine: UK statement

Thank you Madam Secretary General. I would like to start by thanking the Swedish Chairpersonship for organising this special session on the security situation in Ukraine and the panel for their valuable insights. I reaffirm the UK's position – which I made at this Conference last year – that we are committed to ensuring a sovereign, stable and prosperous Ukraine.

Since 2014, Russia has violated fundamental OSCE principles and commitments through its illegal annexation of Crimea and through instigating and fuelling a conflict in the Donbas, critically undermining security in the region.

Sadly, the people of Ukraine suffer as a result. In the seven years since the conflict in Donbas began, nearly 14,000 people have lost their lives, including almost 3,500 civilians. We are grateful to Ms Gillette and all of the staff working for the ICRC in Ukraine for seeking to alleviate some of the challenges felt by the most vulnerable in this conflict.

We are firm in our position – Russia is a party to the conflict in eastern Ukraine, not a mediator. It bears a heavy responsibility for this ongoing devastation.

We continue to be deeply concerned about the heightened tensions caused by Russia's military activity on Ukraine's border and in illegally annexed Crimea since April this year. The UK is carefully monitoring the situation, including troops and equipment remaining in proximity to the Ukrainian border and in illegally annexed Crimea. We continue to urge Russia to engage constructively with the OSCE processes and mechanisms available, including under the Vienna Document, to provide necessary transparency.

In the context of this fragile security situation, adherence to the ceasefire is even more important. We are particularly concerned that the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine has recorded an increase, since late March of this year, of the use of weapons that should have been withdrawn under the Minsk agreements. Reports of shelling by Russia-backed armed formations in Avdiivka over the weekend, injuring ten Ukrainian soldiers, is a recent concerning example. In this context, we note that roughly 90% of the weapons seen by SMM in violation of withdrawal lines this month have been in areas held by Russia backed armed formations – a recurring trend seen throughout the year. Russia should use its considerable influence over the armed formations it backs, to ensure they comply with the Minsk agreement commitments.

We are grateful to Ambassador Çevik and the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission for their factual, impartial reporting on the situation on the ground in Ukraine. The SMM operates in challenging circumstances. The UK condemns continued restrictions on the Mission's freedom of movement, overwhelmingly in areas held by Russia-backed armed formations, as well as high levels of

signal jamming which impede the Mission's ability to carry out its mandate. These restrictions, especially at a time when transparency on the situation on the ground is sorely needed, are unacceptable. We call on Russia to play its part and ensure that the SMM has full, safe, and unhindered access throughout Ukraine, including Crimea.

We welcome Ambassador Kinnunen and his team – you have our full support. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Ambassador Grau for her service. We commend efforts in the Trilateral Contact Group to make progress on commitments made at the December 2019 Paris Summit, including to implement plans on demining and disengagement. If implemented, these plans could significantly improve the lives of civilians living in conflict-affected areas. Russia must match the political will shown by Ukraine in the Trilateral Contact Group, so that progress can be made.

Finally, I'd like to highlight the UK's concerns at Russia's ongoing militarisation of Crimea, the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea. Since, 2015, Russia has conscripted at least 31,000 residents of Crimea. Those who resist conscription face prosecution. We call on Russia to end this appalling violation of human rights immediately.

Russia must withdraw its military personnel and weapons from the territory of Ukraine and end its illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol. The UK fully supports the objectives of Ukraine's International Crimea Platform, which launched last week. Crimea is Ukraine.

We reiterate our support for the Minsk agreements to deliver a peaceful resolution to the conflict in full respect of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and the work of the Normandy Four. Ambassador Mondoloni, Mr Froehly, we thank France and Germany for your efforts in this regard. We call on Russia to fulfil its commitments and cease its support for the armed formations it backs.

The United Kingdom remains unwavering in our support of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders and waters. We have and will continue to stand united with Ukraine in calling out unacceptable Russian aggression against Ukraine and its people. As Minister Polishchuk has rightfully outlined today, Russia's aggressive actions undermine not only the security of Ukraine but the entire OSCE region and must remain our top priority. Thank you Madam Secretary General.