

# OSCE Mission to Moldova report: UK statement

Thank you Madam Chairperson. I join other speakers in welcoming Ambassador Neukirch to the Permanent Council and thanking him for his report.

The United Kingdom continues to support the Permanent Conference on Political Issues ("5+2") as the mechanism most conducive to a comprehensive, peaceful and sustainable settlement of the Transnistrian conflict based on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova, within its internationally recognised borders, and with a special status for Transnistria. The UK welcomes the fact that OSCE Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to this well-established goal at the Stockholm Ministerial Council on 3 December.

As Ambassador Neukirch's report makes clear, the period since his last appearance at this Council in October has been marked by a number of challenges including, but not limited to, the recent energy procurement crisis, ongoing human rights abuses in the Transnistrian region, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are grateful to you, Ambassador Neukirch, for the energy and creativity you have shown in leading the Mission during difficult times. We note, for example, the very active Mission presence in the Security Zone, and intensive shuttle diplomacy which helped to keep channels of communication open.

The UK has regularly expressed its concern at the ongoing presence of the Operational Group of Russian Forces (OGRF) on the territory of the Republic of Moldova. We repeat that concern today. We also take this opportunity to call on the Russian Federation to urgently formulate a proposal for resumption of the process of removal and destruction of ammunition from the Cobasna site. The UK affirms that this process must include the OSCE, in accordance with the 1999 Istanbul Declaration and subsequent extension of the mandate of the Mission to Moldova.

We note the Russian Federation's previously stated position that withdrawal will take place when conditions are right. Given the danger that Cobasna represents to citizens in the region, we invite the Russian Federation to clarify, as a matter of urgency, what would constitute the "right" conditions. Cobasna is not solely a political issue, but also an issue of personal safety to large numbers of citizens.

As Ambassador Neukirch highlights, there has been good cooperation across the Nistru on provision of Covid vaccines. The UK believes that such co-operation provides an example of what can be achieved in other areas, including implementation of outstanding Berlin-plus package measures.

The UK notes with concern that a resolution of the issue of access for commercial vehicles from Transnistria to international road traffic remains

elusive.

We applaud your efforts to implement the Women, Peace and Security Agenda through initiating a capacity building project for female members of the Joint Expert Working Groups and cooperating with UN Women on the establishment of an information Women Advisory Board- featuring women's voices and perspectives from across Moldova. The UK notes with satisfaction that our Embassy in Chisinau played a part in the initial analysis which contributed to development of this important project.

The UK continues to have concerns regarding the Extremism Strategy implemented by the de facto authorities in Transnistria. The manner in which this Strategy defines extremism does not meet internationally accepted standards and limits freedom of expression and association in Transnistria. The UK welcomes the work of the Mission to promote dialogue on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, and notes the positive movement regarding the release of Boris Babaian and Ghennady Ciorba. However the cases of Oleg Horjan and Gennady Kuzmichev remain a serious concern, as documented in Ambassador Neukirch's report. We appreciate your efforts to promote confidence-building measures in the field of human rights. We welcome the joint human rights monitoring webinars the Mission organised for staff of the ombudspersons' offices on both banks on the topic of human rights institutions in public emergencies, as well as the consultations provided to residents of Transnistria on issues related to documentation.

We are grateful for the work of the Mission and this insightful report. We note, and agree with, your closing assessment that standing still "can easily lead to regression". The UK hopes that in the weeks and months ahead, the spirit of collaboration and cooperation on vaccine provision can be extended to other, important matters- such as outstanding Berlin Plus measures.