

# OSCE mission to Moldova: UK statement

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

The United Kingdom continues to support a peaceful, comprehensive and lasting settlement to the Transnistrian conflict on the basis of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova, within its internationally recognised borders, and with a special status for Transnistria.

As Ambassador Neukirch's report makes clear, the period since his last report to this Council in April has been marked by a number of challenges including, but not limited to, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The United Kingdom thanks Ambassador Neukirch for the energy and creativity he has shown in leading the Mission in the face of these challenges. We note, for example, the very active Mission presence in the Security Zone during this period. This has enabled the Mission to observe at first hand the impact of the unilateral establishment of additional checkpoints by the de facto Transnistrian authorities, without reference to any prior discussion at the Joint Control Commission (JCC).

The United Kingdom reiterates its view that these checkpoints should be removed with immediate effect, and that all such matters should be brought to the JCC for proper discussion in future, in line with the Cease-fire Agreement of 1992.

We are grateful to Ambassador Neukirch for highlighting worrying developments with regard to human rights in recent months, in particular since the adoption of a new Extremism Strategy by the de facto authorities in Transnistria in March. The manner in which this Strategy defines extremism does not meet internationally accepted standards.

Following its adoption, the Strategy appears to have been used as the basis for a series of actions by the de facto authorities designed to limit freedom of expression and association by citizens of the Transnistrian region. The United Kingdom has called on the de facto authorities in Transnistria to reconsider their approach.

The arrest of four Moldovan citizens on 8 October at Camenca, in connection with a long running criminal matter, is well documented in this report. We commend Ambassador Neukirch for the agile manner in which he has sought to intervene, in his role as mediator, in order to encourage both sides to ensure respect for the rule of law and the human rights of all those involved. The United Kingdom continues to follow this and other human rights issues with concern.

The United Kingdom has regularly expressed its concern at the ongoing presence on the territory of the Republic of Moldova of the Operational Group

of Russian Forces (OGRF). We repeat that concern today, noting that no progress has been made towards the OGRF's orderly withdrawal. We also take this opportunity to repeat our call on the Russian Federation to include the OSCE in the process of removal and destruction of ammunition from Transnistria, in accordance with the 1999 Istanbul Declaration and subsequent extension of the mandate of the Mission to Moldova.

The appalling explosion at the Port of Beirut on 4 August reminds us of the urgency of this matter. We note the Russian Federation's position that withdrawal will take place when conditions are right. Given the danger that old ammunition represents to citizens in the region, we invite the Russian Federation to clarify, as a matter of urgency, what would constitute the "right conditions".

COVID-19, freedom of movement and other human rights challenges have occupied the Mission and the parties to a large extent in the period since the last report by Ambassador Neukirch. The United Kingdom urges both parties and all participants in the 5+2 Process to now redouble efforts to find the necessary solutions which can deliver on all outstanding Confidence Building Measures as a matter of priority.

As we mark the 20th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security this week, I would also be interested to hear from Ambassador Neukirch more about how his Mission mainstreams a gender perspective into their support to the working groups of the 5+2 process.