

OSCE reports on conflict in eastern Ukraine: UK response

Thank you Mister Chair. Ambassador Çevik, Ambassador Kinnunen we are grateful for your reports today and all your efforts towards a peaceful and sustainable resolution to the conflict.

Your reports today, as well as the letter issued to the Permanent Council by the Secretary General on 14 February, illustrate the gravity of the current situation, which is clearly fragile.

The UK remains gravely concerned by the massive, unprovoked and unjustified Russian military build-up on Ukraine's border and in illegally-annexed Crimea.

In this Council I have repeatedly pointed to Russia's bellicose rhetoric towards Ukraine, as well as its disinformation about alleged Ukrainian actions and the importance of transparency and verification. Indeed, since the beginning of February we have identified over 40 different stories emanating from the Kremlin, promoting unfounded claims in a shameful attempt to justify any future further Russian military action against Ukraine. We support efforts by the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) to establish the facts on the ground and provide their impartial reporting on the situation.

In the context of unprecedented tensions in the region, we regret that Russia, once again, has failed to honour its commitments following initiation of the [Vienna Document Risk Reduction Mechanism](#). It is wholly unacceptable that Russia is claiming that Vienna Document Paragraph 16, which requires participating States to "consult and cooperate with each other about any unusual and unscheduled military activities . . . outside their normal peacetime locations", does not apply.

Despite Russia's announcement that some Eastern Military District & Western Military District troops are withdrawing to permanent locations, and we are yet to see real evidence of any military withdrawal that would indicate a de-escalation on Russia's part. Russia continues to mass extraordinary levels of military forces along Ukraine's border and in illegally annexed Crimea. We call on Russia to abide by its commitments, engage constructively in the confidence building measures – which all participating States have signed up to – and provide much needed transparency around its military activity.

It is the rising threat from Russia that led the UK to temporarily withdraw our seconded personnel to the Special Monitoring Mission out of Ukraine. We are grateful to the Mission for its assistance in facilitating their movement. This decision was made due to the UK's duty of care responsibilities. The UK remains a strong supporter of the SMM and its mandate. Both we, and the British women and men of the SMM, are ready to keep supporting the Mission in these extraordinary times, and against the backdrop

of this unprecedented threat from Russia.

Ambassador Çevik, we remain grateful for the SMM's impartial, facts-based reporting. We were deeply concerned to see that between 9 September 2021 and 12 January 2022, the SMM recorded a doubling of the use of weapons that should have been withdrawn according to the Minsk agreements. It is noteworthy that during this period, the SMM recorded 477 weapons in violation of their respective withdrawal lines, of which 83 per cent were in non-government controlled areas.

We have, and will continue to condemn unacceptable restrictions and threats directed towards the Mission, including the appalling case on 11 February when a member of the Russian-backed armed formations threatened an SMM patrol with arrest at a border checkpoint on the uncontrolled segment of the Ukraine-Russia State border. This is just one instance of the systematic restrictions of freedom of movement the Mission experiences in non-government controlled areas. Between 9 September 2021 and 12 January 2022, 92 per cent of all SMM freedom of movement restrictions occurred in areas held by the Russia backed armed formations. Once again, we call on Russia to use its undeniable influence over the armed formations it backs to ensure the Mission has safe, free and unimpeded access throughout Ukraine, including Crimea.

Ambassador Kinnunen, we welcome the ongoing efforts by you and your team to make progress on issues that would have a positive impact on the security situation in eastern Ukraine. We welcome your report that the Trilateral Contact Group last week discussed concrete topics, particularly in the Political Working Group, where a number of real, substantive issues related to the political settlement of the conflict were discussed. We hope this will translate into tangible progress towards an end to this conflict in full respect of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Russia as the instigator, and as a party to this conflict, must match Ukraine's political will for this to be possible.

We also urge Russia to use its undeniable influence to make progress on issues which continue to have a devastating impact on conflict-affected civilians in eastern Ukraine. This includes the opening of new entry-exit checkpoints along the line of contact, now a year overdue on the Russia backed armed formations side, and on plans for further demining and disengagement areas.

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 Trilateral Contact Group and the Normandy Four in this regard. We call on Russia to refrain from any unilateral measures that undermine the Minsk agreements and Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and instead focus on implementing its commitments. In this respect, we condemn the action taken by the Russian Duma to propose that the Russian President recognise the regions of Luhansk and Donetsk as independent. This would directly undermine the Minsk agreements and must be clearly rejected by the Russian authorities, in line with their commitments.

Russia must withdraw its military personnel and weapons from the territory of Ukraine; cease its support for the armed formations it backs; and stop access restrictions and intimidation of the SMM in areas held by the Russia-backed armed formations.

The UK strongly supports Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders, including its territorial waters. We do not and will not recognise Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea. The UK has consistently stood with Ukraine in opposing all instances of Russian aggression towards Ukraine and we will continue to do so, including through sanctions, together with our international partners.