

Russia decision to close OSCE Observer Mission at 2 Russian border checkpoints: UK statement

Thank you Madam Chair. The United Kingdom took note of the note verbale circulated by the Russian delegation informing the OSCE Chairpersonship in Office and OSCE Secretariat of their refusal as host country to extend the mandate of the OSCE Observer Mission, and their expectations for the closure of the Mission.

The position of the United Kingdom on the OSCE Observer Mission has been consistent and clear. Despite its severe limitations, the Mission provided important information on the situation at the 2 Russian border checkpoints Gukovo and Donetsk and we have repeatedly joined others in calling for both an extension of time, and an expansion in scope, of its mandate. As the responses to Ambassador Varga's most recent report made clear, the Mission continues to enjoy the support of the overwhelming majority of participating States, albeit not the host country.

We deplore this decision by Russia to unilaterally close the Mission. This is yet another negative step by Russia at a time when greater transparency and confidence building are sorely needed in the region, following the largest Russian military build up on Ukraine's borders and in illegally annexed Crimea since 2014.

We remind Russia that, as a signatory to the Minsk agreements, including the 2014 Minsk Protocol, it has committed to ensuring permanent monitoring of the Ukrainian-Russian state border and verification by the OSCE. Russia's decision takes us even further away from fulfilling the comprehensive monitoring foreseen under the Minsk Protocol and contradicts the spirit of the Minsk agreements. It is deeply alarming.

We ask Russia how they intend to fulfil the commitment they undertook in signing the Minsk Protocol to ensure permanent monitoring of the border by the OSCE.

I ask that this statement be attached to the Journal of the Day.