

Speech: United Kingdom's support for the OSCE and its efforts to achieve stability, peace and democracy for the people of Europe

Thank you Mr President,

And thank you Foreign Minister Alfano for your briefing.

The United Kingdom fully supports the OSCE and its efforts to achieve stability, peace and democracy for the people of Europe, including through dialogue. Like the United Nations, the OSCE is a pillar of the international rules based system and respect for its fundamental principles must be restored.

Nowhere in Europe is this more important than in Ukraine. Let me reaffirm the United Kingdom's full support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, including in Crimea. These are words by which we open so many of our Council's resolutions. They are fundamental to all Member States of the United Nations. Yet last month we marked the fourth anniversary of Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea. That act, by a permanent member of this Council, showed complete disregard for our UN Charter and trampled all over international law. In addition to annexing Crimea, Russia has destabilised Eastern Ukraine and continues to fuel the conflict at enormous human and material cost to the Ukrainians people.

As always, it is civilians that suffer most. Since the conflict began, over 10,300 people have lost their lives, almost 25,000 have been injured and 3.4 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, particularly along the line of contact. And we have seen reports that over 1000 Russian military personnel and mercenaries have lost their lives, so the Russian people are also mourning their children. It is only through a truly sustainable ceasefire and genuine political will, through the implementation of the Minsk Agreement, that this conflict will be brought to an end. We welcome the latest recommitment to the ceasefire by the Trilateral Contact Group, but ceasefires have been broken in the past, and have not resulted in sustained improvements to the security situation.

While the conflict continues, the Special Monitoring Mission, ably directed by Chief Monitor Apakan, must be permitted to carry out its mandate in full and be granted full, safe and unhindered access to all of Ukraine, including those parts of the border with Russia not under Ukraine's control, and Crimea. The increasingly aggressive behaviour and threats we are seeing towards OSCE monitors are deeply concerning and we remember the sacrifice of paramedic Joseph Stone on 23 April last year.

Mr President,

If, as Russia claims, it truly cares about the people of the Donbas, it should end the fighting that it started, withdraw its military personnel and weapons and cease its support for the separatists. Russia should also show a genuine political will to end the conflict and to abide by the Minsk Agreements that it signed. Until these steps are taken, we will work with our EU partners to ensure that sanctions remain fully in place.

Mr President,

We must retain the Council's focus of this Council on Ukraine. Next Thursday the UK will co-host an Arria-formula meeting to discuss this blatant violation of international law and the UN Charter. The chaos, violence and ongoing loss of life resulting from Russia's military operations more than merit this Council's time. We must be ready to remain seized of this issue.

Foreign Minister Alfano, we welcome and strongly support Italy's intention to prioritise tackling Modern Slavery, and addressing the challenges associated with migration, including corruption and trafficking. In addition, we support your focus on the implementation of the OSCE Gender Action Plan and on protracted conflicts, which continue to undermine security in the OSCE region. These are areas where the OSCE's cross-dimensional approach can really add value. We are keen to work with you to ensure that OSCE activities complement, rather than duplicate, the work of UN Agencies and other organisations.

Mr President,

The OSCE's autonomous institutions and network of Field Operations can and do make a significant contribution to the promotion of security, stability, democracy and the rule of law across the region. However, it is only able to do so when Member States stand up for the principles which guide it. This is the task of all of us on the Security Council. To stand up for those who suffer acts of aggression from their bigger neighbours. To stand up for the UN charter. To stand up for international law.

Thank you Mr President.