

UK response to Ambassadors Çevik and Grau

Thank you Mr Chair. I would like to thank Ambassador Çevik and Ambassador Grau for your in depth briefings today. We are grateful to you and your teams for your ongoing efforts towards a peaceful and sustainable resolution of the conflict.

The UK continues to share Ukraine's significant concerns about the recent increased Russian military activity on Ukraine's border and in illegally annexed Crimea, as well as about reports that Russia plans to restrict access to parts of the Black Sea and to the Kerch Strait. We call again on Russia to cease provocative activity and engage in Risk Reduction measures without further delay.

We are also concerned by the gradual increase in kinetic activity along the line of contact. While the number of ceasefire violations recorded by the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (SMM) between 1 January and 20 March was significantly lower than during the same period last year, there has been a two-fold increase in the number of ceasefire violations compared to the previous reporting period.

We commend Ukraine for the restraint it has shown and urge Russia to focus its efforts on de-escalation along the line of contact, including through constructive discussion in the Trilateral Contact Group on recommitment to the ceasefire and bringing an end to misinformation and escalatory rhetoric.

Ambassador Çevik, in the context of these concerning developments, the SMM's impartial, facts-based reporting is all the more important. We are grateful to the Mission for stepping up the activities of its Kherson Monitoring Team and increasing patrols in areas adjacent to the Sea of Azov, as outlined at yesterday's informal briefing from the Deputy Chief Monitors. We regret that the SMM continues to be prevented from accessing the illegally annexed Crimean peninsula and is facing systematic restrictions from the Russia-backed armed formations in the south-eastern part of Donetsk region. It is an unacceptable violation of your mandate that, as you highlight in your report, the Mission's monitoring continues to be impeded through the targeting of its equipment and restrictions on its freedom of movement, overwhelmingly in non-government controlled areas.

UAVs are a critical technological capability for the Mission. The SMM observed 69% of the 435 weapons it reported in violation of their respective withdrawal lines using UAVs. It is noteworthy that 94% of these weapons were in areas held by Russia-backed armed formations. It is unacceptable that the Mission has seen a two-fold increase in the instances of its UAV's experiencing GPS signal interference assessed as jamming, as well as continued instances of its UAVs being targeted by gunfire. Moreover, we were appalled by the SMM's spot report this week, which outlined that on 17 April the Russia backed armed formations installed a camera on the SMM mast without

permission, forcing the SMM to disable its own camera system.

We were also deeply concerned to see in a spot report this week that the Russia backed armed formations in Donetsk region again denied an SMM patrol passage across the line of contact for the sixth time this year. Ambassador Çevik, your report outlined that 93 per cent of restrictions on the SMM between 1 January and 20 March occurred in non-government controlled areas.

We urge Russia once again to use its undeniable influence over the armed formations it backs to ensure the SMM's monitors and equipment have safe, unconditional and unimpeded access throughout Ukraine, including in Crimea and areas near the Ukraine-Russia state border.

Sadly, civilians are also impacted by restrictions on their freedom of movement. Ukrainians rely on crossing the line of contact to collect pensions, medical care and to see their families. However, between 1 January and 20 March, there was a 97 per cent reduction in the number of civilian crossings compared to similar periods in 2020 and 2019. Ambassador Grau, we are grateful to you and your team for your ongoing efforts to open the checkpoints at Shchastia and Zolote. It is unacceptable that Russia and the armed formations it backs continue to keep them closed on their side of the line of contact, five months after they agreed to open them.

Ambassador Grau, we also welcome your work to make progress on other commitments made at the December 2019 Paris Summit, including to implement agreed plans on demining and disengagement. Tragically, we continue to receive reports of civilian casualties resulting from mines, unexploded ordnance and explosive devices. We call on Russia to match the political will shown by Ukraine in the Trilateral Contact Group, so that progress can be made on this vital work.

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.

Russia must play its part and fulfil its commitments. We repeat our call on Russia to withdraw its military personnel and weapons from the territory of Ukraine and to cease its support for the armed formations it backs.

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.