

UK statement in response to Ambassadors Çevik and Grau

Thank you, Mr Chair. I would like to join previous speakers in thanking Ambassadors Çevik and Grau for briefing us today and for the crucial work you and your teams do.

Both of your reports draw attention to the volatility of this conflict and its devastating impact on thousands of Ukrainian civilians living under constant threat in the conflict area. Regular spikes in violence continue to threaten these innocent people on a daily basis and remain a serious concern for the UK.

Ambassador Grau, we welcome the work of the Trilateral Contact Group towards achieving peace and stability in eastern Ukraine. We reaffirm our full support to the Minsk agreements, and we join others in this hall in reiterating that Russia also signed up to those agreements and has obligations under them.

The TCG is made up of representatives from Ukraine, Russia, and the OSCE, which chairs the group. We commend the Ukrainian government for the commitment they have shown to a peaceful resolution of the conflict and the efforts they are making in this regard. Sadly, the Russian Federation consistently fails to play its part. They should fulfil their responsibility to act constructively in the TCG and its Working Groups to ensure that progress can be made.

Ambassador Çevik, we appreciate your ongoing efforts to ensure the SMM continues its important work while ensuring duty of care for all staff remains a priority. We commend the numerous sensible precautionary measures you have taken, and continue to take, in light of the pandemic. This makes it all the more unjustifiable that the Russia-backed armed formations continue to use COVID-19 as a pretext to restrict the Mission's access across the Line of Contact. This is a clear violation of the SMM's mandate, and is having a grave operational consequence – as you outlined. The pandemic must not be used as an excuse to blind the Mission or divide it into three.

Unfortunately, the SMM has always operated in challenging circumstances, and we are deeply concerned to note that the SMM's assets continue to be targeted. It is unacceptable that three SMM cameras were damaged within the space of a few weeks, in Petrivske and Shyrokyne and at the Oktiabr mine. We reiterate that the Mission must have full, safe and unimpeded access throughout the entirety of Ukraine, in accordance with its mandate. We call on Russia to use its influence over the armed formations it backs in this regard.

We welcome the re-opening of some Entry-Exit checkpoints, which are important for maintaining social and economic links between Ukrainians either side of the line of contact. We are concerned by reports of inconsistent and sporadic

reopening of checkpoints on the non-government controlled side, with some civilians continuing to be denied passage. While reasonable precautions should of course be taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19, this should not be used as a pretext for unnecessary limitations on their freedom of movement. We join your calls to re-open all the entry and exit crossing points and remove unnecessary restrictions.

The Russian Federation has not only failed to demonstrate the political will to implement the Minsk agreements in full, but has also taken unilateral steps which undermine Ukrainian sovereignty and the spirit of the Minsk agreements. We condemn Russia's use of "passportisation" policies in Donetsk and Luhansk. The latest example of this unacceptable behaviour is the involvement of Ukrainian residents from non-government controlled Donetsk and Luhansk in voting on the Russian constitutional amendments. We also further condemn Russia's organisation of voting in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol, which is Ukrainian territory.

Russia should stop these provocations and withdraw their military personnel and weapons from all Ukrainian territory; cease its support for the armed formations it backs; stop access restrictions and intimidation of SMM in areas held by Russia-backed armed formations and reverse all unilateral measures. They should also take their international humanitarian obligations seriously and allow crucial assistance to reach civilians.

The UK 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 and other restrictive measures, together with our international partners. Thank you.