

Speech: “This is only the meaningful path to long-term peace in Ukraine. And until this path is taken, sanctions against Russia must remain in place.”

Thank you Mr President and I welcome Foreign Minister Kurz to the Security Council. I'm grateful for your briefing just now. Your chairmanship of the OSCE, together with Austria hosting the OSCE and parts of the United Nations, shows how central your country is to international cooperation and to the rules-based system.

Sadly, as we heard here yesterday, the rules-based system is under threat. It's a threat that we talk about often in this chamber, but to the residents of cities like Marinka, this threat is a horrifying, daily reality. For the past three years, the people there have lived in fear, subject to the daily, unrelenting dangers that have become the norm on the front line in eastern Ukraine. Residents there speak of daily sniper fire, of daily shelling, the daily scramble for shelter. For nearly three years, they have survived without gas supplies, in the face of plummeting temperatures every winter.

These are the consequences of Russia's violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. This is what happens when the rules based system is attacked. We cannot allow this to become the new normal. We must use all of the tools at our disposal in response.

The OSCE has a critical role to play – and I'd like to commend the role of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in particular, working tirelessly under the able direction of Chief Monitor Apakan. It's thanks to the bravery of the OSCE's monitors that we know what's going on in places like Marinka. It's thanks to them that we know that ceasefire violations this year have already reached record highs.

It is unacceptable that the Mission continues to be fired upon and to face restrictions on access. Such actions, so often perpetrated by the separatists, only fuels suspicion that the separatists are concealing activity at odds with the Minsk agreements.

So I hope that we can all be clear today that aggression towards monitors must stop and the Mission must be given unrestricted access to all of Ukraine, including the disengagement areas and those parts of the border with Russia not under Ukraine's control.

As we heard yesterday, the long term solution to the situation in Eastern Ukraine requires Russia to end its destabilising activities in the region, comply with its commitments under the Minsk agreements, withdraw its weapons

and personnel, use its considerable influence over the separatists to bring an end to the killing, and return Crimea to its rightful place as part of Ukraine. This is only the meaningful path to long-term peace in Ukraine. And until this path is taken, sanctions against Russia must remain in place.

Beyond Ukraine, we should not lose sight of this Council's need to work closely with the Austrian OSCE chairmanship to resolve other issues affecting the region and help protect fundamental rights and freedoms. These include protracted conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabkh.

We also value the vital role the OSCE plays in risk reduction in the region and we welcome the launch of the Structured Dialogue. We support your focus, Mr Foreign Minister, on youth and radicalisation, where the OSCE with its cross-dimensional approach to security can add real value.

If the OSCE is to respond to these and other challenges, we must also continue to strengthen the organisation. One way to do that is through strong appointments and I'm pleased that the UK has put forward an excellent candidate for the High Commissioner on National Minorities position in the OSCE as a sign of our continued commitment to the organisation.

We are also pleased that our Ambassador to the OSCE is chairing the OSCE Human Dimension Committee this year and working closely with the Austrian Chairmanship.

In conclusion, Mr President, events in Eastern Ukraine reinforce just how important the OSCE is to international cooperation. The work being done there is vital to the beleaguered residents of Marinka and to all Ukrainians in the East of the country. Sadly events in Ukraine highlight the threats that countries in the OSCE area, and the rules based system as a whole, continue to face. If we are to respond to them effectively, we must continue to strengthen the OSCE, and with it, this Council's cooperation.

Thank you.

Press release: Communities Secretary confirms funding certainty for councils

Communities Secretary Sajid Javid has confirmed that councils will continue to benefit from the long-term financial certainty of a four-year funding settlement, helping them to plan ahead with confidence.

He also confirmed he is working closely with the Chancellor of the Exchequer

to determine how best to provide further support to businesses facing the steepest increases, with further details expected to be set out in the Budget in two weeks.

Mr Javid published individual funding allocations for local authorities for the second year of the historic settlement, with figures largely unchanged from those published a year ago.

It means that over the course of this Parliament, councils will receive more than £200 billion in government funding – ensuring they can deliver the frontline services people value. Councils are also able to use this increased certainty to change the way they work and become more efficient, building on the £508 million savings already delivered across local government.

It also prepares the ground for wider reforms, to ensure councils benefit from 100% business rate retention, giving them the financial autonomy they have long campaigned for. Councils in six areas across the country will start piloting this approach from April, with all councils invited to apply to participate in further pilots from April 2018.

Communities Secretary Sajid Javid said:

Our historic funding deal, accepted by 97% of councils, offers the financial certainty needed to plan ahead, with more than £200 billion over the course of this Parliament. This includes £7.6 billion dedicated funding and extra flexibility to provide vital adult social care services for the most vulnerable people in our communities.

But local government funding doesn't just have to be fair for local government. It also has to be fair to the people who provide the funds in the first place, and that includes the millions of hardworking business owners who pay business rates. Working closely with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, we will determine how best to provide further support to businesses facing the steepest increases, with further details expected to be set out in the Budget in two weeks.

Over the next year, I'll be working with councils across the country as we move towards 100% business rates retention, giving local authorities the financial autonomy they have campaigned for over decades.

Further information

The key elements of the 2017-18 local government financial settlement are:

Adult social care

The Spending Review last year gave councils the opportunity to raise funds to provide dedicated care for the growing elderly population through an adult

social care precept on council tax.

Listening to views from councils to provide for elderly and vulnerable citizens, the Communities Secretary confirmed that he will bring forward increases in the adult social care precept. Councils can choose to raise it by 3%, meaning they will have the ability to raise an additional £208 million next financial year.

This comes on top of a new adult social care grant, worth £240 million next year, and an improved Better Care Fund worth up to £1.5 billion so councils can work more closely with the NHS.

It brings total dedicated social care funding to £7.6 billion over the settlement period, with councils receiving more than £200 billion over the course of this Parliament.

Council tax

The Government is committed to keeping council tax down and will maintain referendum principles to protect hard-working tax-payers from rising bills. Council tax in England has fallen by 9% in real terms since 2010 and is expected to be lower in real terms in 2019-20 than it was in 2010-11.

Business rates

As part of the revaluation of business rates to make bills fairer, measures such as transitional relief have been made available to support those seeing increases. However, Government is looking at how best to provide further support to businesses facing the steepest increases. Ministers expect to be in a position to make an announcement at the time of the Budget in two weeks.

100% retention of business rates

To reduce local government's dependence on central government for funding – long campaigned for by councils – by the end of this Parliament, local government will keep 100% of the income raised locally through business rates. To ensure councils with less business rates do not lose out there will continue to be redistributions between authorities.

The Local Government Finance Bill, currently before Parliament, provides the legislative framework for these reforms. Pilots of these reforms will take place from this April in Liverpool, Greater Manchester, West Midlands, West of England, Cornwall and Greater London. All councils are invited to apply to participate in the pilots from April 2018.

Press release: Foreign Secretary hosts high-level foreign policy talks with South Korea

As a sign of the strength of the close bilateral relationship between the UK and South Korea, the Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson has hosted his South Korean counterpart – Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se – at Lancaster House in London, for annual foreign policy talks covering trade, defence and security.

South Korea is an important strategic partner for the UK, both in Asia and on the world stage. The two ministers reaffirmed the depth of the relationship and the strong commitment to work together on pressing international issues – from collaborating together to counter Daesh, to peacekeeping operations in South Sudan, tackling piracy off the coast of Somalia and enhancing our development cooperation in Africa and other countries.

The Ministers discussed regional and international security, and emphasised the importance of close work with like-minded countries to uphold the rules-based international order. In light of recent North Korean missile tests, the Foreign Secretary reaffirmed the UK's commitment to working closely with South Korea and other international partners to uphold and enforce sanctions against North Korea as a clear sign that the international community will not stand for their nuclear weapons programme that violates multiple UNSC resolutions.

The talks also included our strong defence relationship, which expanded last year with the first ever deployment of RAF Typhoons to South Korea, our biggest contribution to date at last year's US and South Korea military exercises, and the intensification of our already close naval partnership. We will build on this momentum this year and look to expand our cooperation in cyber, intelligence and logistics.

The Foreign Secretary also praised the UK- Korea trade relationship, currently worth nearly £11 billion, which continues to go from strength to strength. South Korea is the third largest destination in Asia for UK goods exports, and the UK is South Korea's fifth largest foreign direct investor.

The Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said:

South Korea is a very important partner for the UK and our relationship is going from strength to strength. Two trading nations with a global outlook, we have established a trade working group to discuss tackling barriers to market access, trade and investment, with the aim of building on our trade relationship already worth £11 billion.

On the world stage too, we are working together to solve global

problems. Foreign Minister Yun and I have discussed the importance of close cooperation on development assistance, both our ongoing peacekeeping operations in South Sudan, and our commitments to Somalia – including the upcoming conference in London.

And on defence and security, the UK stands absolutely united with South Korea and our international partners in condemning the dangerous and provocative behaviour of the North Korean regime, which is a clear threat to regional and international stability.

Further information

[News story: Brokenshire condemns attack on PSNI officer](#)

From:

First published:

22 February 2017

Part of:

Commenting on the explosion of a device discovered at the home of a serving police officer, the Secretary of State Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP said:

This is a despicable attack. The people who planted this device intended to kill or cause really serious injury.

Their murderous intent is in stark contrast to the focus of this police officer who went out this morning to serve the community.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland have our unstinting support for their work in keeping people safe and the public service they give.

News story: UK government funds City of Derry air link

From:

First published:

22 February 2017

Part of:

Government announces £3.8 million for a Londonderry to London air route to begin at the end of March.

The UK government has today announced £3.8 million for a Londonderry to London air route, following the decision by current operator Ryanair to stop serving the air link at the end of March.

BMI Regional has been chosen as the preferred operator for the route between City of Derry Airport and London Stansted, following a competitive tender process by Derry City & Strabane District Council.

Flights will begin on Sunday 26 March and the government will fund the route over the 2017/18 and 2018/19 financial years.

The new service will include two return flights each day, except for Saturdays which will have one flight each way.

Aviation Minister Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon said:

The UK government has worked closely with Derry City and Strabane District Council to protect this important route to City of Derry Airport. £3.8 million UK Government funding will allow 13 return flights to connect Londonderry to London every week. The new service will allow business passengers to get to central London and complete a full day's work before returning home.

This is the first ever government backing for a public service obligation (PSO) in Northern Ireland. The government maintains regional airport links through the [Regional Air Connectivity Fund](#), which can be used to protect important regional air connections to London which may otherwise be lost.