



STATEMENT IN REPLY TO THE BRIEFINGS
GIVEN BY AMBASSADORS GRAU AND ÇEVİK

Delivered by Ambassador Steffen Kongstad at the Permanent Council
Vienna, 23 April 2020

Mr. Chair,

Let me join others in thanking Ambassadors Grau and Çevik for their reports.

Norway welcomes the recent release and exchange of detainees related to the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. This positive move should be followed up by further releases from detention and additional steps to implement the agreements reached at the Normandy summit last December, including respecting the ceasefire. We thank Ambassador Heidi Grau and all those involved in the Trilateral Contact Group and the working groups for the efforts that made this exchange of detainees possible, and for their work to improve conditions for the civilian population.

We regret the reported deterioration of the security situation in Donetsk and Luhansk regions. More ceasefire violations and an increase in civilian casualties are worrying developments. Many serious casualties are the result of mines or UXOs, as was the tragic death of the American paramedic Joseph Stone, who was killed by a landmine while on patrol three years ago today. Norway yet again recalls the obligations under the Mine Ban Convention, The amended Protocol II of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and other instruments of International Humanitarian Law. We call upon all parties to refrain from laying mines and to contribute to mine clearance.

The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic represents a threat to the whole of Ukraine, as to all our countries. This threat is particularly serious for the civilian population in the conflict-affected areas, particularly in the areas not under government control. Many lack access to medical help. The closure of entry-exit checkpoints to civilian traffic adds to their hardship. We urge all parties to facilitate access of humanitarian supplies to the conflict-affected areas through proper channels.

We regret that the armed formations in the past weeks have repeatedly denied SMM monitors access to areas under their control. This affects the SMM's ability to fulfil its mandate. The armed formations must grant the SMM full access in accordance with its mandate.

Norway thanks Ambassador Yaşar Halit Çevik for his efforts to keep the participating states up to date on the developments in the SMM using web-based meetings. We welcome the measures taken by SMM to protect observers from COVID-19 to the extent possible. Closely following the spread of the disease and assessing the risks to the health and security of observers must be a priority. We note that evacuation and contingency plans have been reviewed and updated. Relocation of staff and suspension of certain patrolling activities has been necessary. Complementary monitoring through the use of UAVs is therefore particularly important now. Interference in the flight of UAVs is unacceptable.

We call on all parties to uphold the ceasefire, protect civilians and continue to follow up the commitments of the Minsk agreements and the Normandy Summit. Norway again reiterates its strong support of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, including the Crimean Peninsula and the adjoining territorial waters.