

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

Delivered by Ambassador Steffen Kongstad at the Permanent Council
Vienna, 6 February 2020

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Madame Chair,

First, I would like to join others in welcoming Ambassador Heidi Grau to the Permanent Council in her new capacity as the OSCE Chair-in-Office's Special Representative in Ukraine and in the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG). The Trilateral Contact Group and the Working Groups continue to play an important role in facilitating dialogue, especially on matters of importance for civilians in the conflict-affected areas. I would also like to welcome Ambassador Çevik back to the Permanent Council and thank him for his report.

Norway welcomes the developments under the meeting of the Normandie group in December and the resulting exchange of detainees. The SMM has registered fewer ceasefire violations in this reporting period. However, we regret that the comprehensive ceasefire agreed at the summit in Paris has not been strictly followed by the parties. The renewed increase in ceasefire violations during the last weeks is also of great concern. To keep up momentum and prepare for a new Normandie summit this spring, it is important to build confidence by complying with previous agreements.

We are pleased to note that the SMM is ready to monitor three new disengagement areas as soon as these are established. We urge the parties to agree on the three areas to follow up the Normandie summit and increase security along the contact line.

The situation for civilians on both sides of the contact line continues to be difficult. We commend the SMM for facilitating ceasefires to enable repairs to damaged civilian infrastructure, such as water supply, electricity and mobile communication. Damage to essential infrastructure from the parties' continued use of weapons banned by the Minsk agreements is unacceptable.

Norway strongly regrets that the parties continue to lay mines and that there seems to be no progress on clearing mines outside the disengagement areas. Landmines are a constant threat to civilians and SMM monitors and have caused serious casualties. We call on all parties to stop laying mines and actually carry out humanitarian demining.

The new bridge at the crossing-point in Stanytsia Luhanska is a welcome improvement. However, crossing the contact line is still difficult and time-consuming for people who need to cross to claim pensions, seek medical treatment or visit family. Many IDPs still live in temporary housing on both sides of the contact line. More needs to be done by all parties to facilitate crossing the contact line, agree on new crossing points and improve conditions for internally displaced persons.

Norway commends the SMM for monitoring events on the International Day for Elimination of Violence against Women and the start of 16 days Campaign of Activism to End Gender-Based Violence. This helped ensure the safety of events organised by international organisations and NGOs. We are also pleased that the efforts of gender mainstreaming within the SMM are continuing.

We welcome continued improvements in the security of premises for the SMM. The safety of monitors is of great concern. All parties must ensure freedom of movement for SMM patrols. We regret the large number of restrictions on their freedom of movement, most of which are in non-government-controlled areas.

We highly appreciate the work done by ambassadors Grau, Çevik and their teams. Norway will continue to support their work.

Norway again reiterates its strong support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, including the Crimean Peninsula and the adjoining territorial waters.