

Foreign Secretary updated Parliament on 28 April about the current situation in Ukraine and action the UK plans to take.



Speaking to Parliament on 28 April, the Foreign Secretary, William Hague, said:

Mr Speaker, with permission I will make a Statement to update the House on the crisis in Ukraine, developments over the last three weeks and the action we propose to take now.

From 6th April, illegal armed groups began to occupy government buildings in Kharkiv, Donetsk and Lugansk.

From the 12th April, in an apparently coordinated fashion, police and security service buildings were seized in smaller towns across the East of Ukraine. Like the armed men without insignia who took control of Crimea in February, many are well-equipped, operate like professional soldiers who have trained together, and wear matching uniforms. **Russia's claim that these groups are purely local militias has no credibility.**

NATO's Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, General Philip Breedlove, has stated that, "what is happening in eastern Ukraine is a military operation that is well planned and organized and we assess that it is being carried out at the direction of Russia". We share this assessment.

On 14th April I attended the EU Foreign Ministers' meeting in Luxembourg, where we decided upon additional sanctions.

These sanctions were then suspended in the light of talks in Geneva between Ukraine, Russia, the US and the EU on 17th April, which succeeded in agreeing steps to reduce tensions.

The agreement committed all sides to refrain from violence or provocative actions in the South and East of Ukraine. It required all illegal armed groups to be disarmed and to vacate all illegally seized buildings and occupied public places, in return for amnesty for protestors, in a process assisted by the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission. The Ukrainian government promised to take forward an inclusive, transparent and accountable constitutional process.

I spoke to Ukrainian Foreign Minister Deschytzia immediately after the Geneva Agreement, which we strongly welcomed.

The Ukrainian Government has made determined efforts to implement the agreement in good faith. It has put a draft amnesty law to the Ukrainian Parliament, begun a constitutional reform process, including decentralisation and the expansion of local authority power and continued to collect illegal weapons. It is removing roadblocks around the Maidan, and protestors are vacating government buildings in Kyiv. In addition it has announced steps to guarantee the protection of the Russian language and its special status, and it has condemned anti-semitism or intolerance.

I pay tribute to the Ukrainian government for these steps and for behaving with immense restraint under extremely difficult circumstances.

The Prime Minister announced on Good Friday that the United Kingdom is providing £1m to support the deployment of up to 400 additional observers to strengthen the OSCE Mission.

By contrast, Russia has so far failed to implement any part of the Geneva agreement.

I spoke to Foreign Minister Lavrov last Wednesday. While welcoming his participation in the Geneva meeting I said to him that I could not identify a single positive step Russia has taken to implement the agreement.

It has not condemned the acts of separatists, or called on armed militants to vacate buildings and put down their arms. It has done nothing to rein in pro-Russian separatist groups, **who continue to attack Ukrainian arms depots and military personnel**, take over government buildings, and **detain journalists** and OSCE Military Observers, which we utterly condemn. The detention and parading of these observers, who should be released immediately, is utterly reprehensible and does further damage to the standing of Russia and the reputation of such groups operating in Eastern Ukraine.

The deplorable shooting today of the Mayor of Kharkiv is another sign of the violence being instigated against those who have opted to support a united Ukraine.

Furthermore, last week Russia announced further military exercises on Ukraine's borders; Russia's UN Ambassador claimed they had the right to deploy so-called "peace-keepers" on Ukrainian territory; and Foreign Minister Lavrov said Russia reserved the right to attack Ukraine to defend ethnic Russians. **There is of course no evidence of threats to or attacks on Russians in Eastern Ukraine.**

I proposed to Foreign Minister Lavrov that Russia could demonstrate its good faith by making an immediate public call for the full implementation of the Geneva agreement.

I also proposed that Russia's Acting Head of Mission in Kyiv could join in assisting the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission on the ground, including by negotiating with the groups illegally occupying buildings.

I warned him that in the absence of such steps, the European Union and others would impose increasing sanctions.

As I have often said in this House, we do not view developments in Ukraine as presenting a zero sum strategic choice. Ukraine can be a bridge between East and West and be able to maintain good relations with Russia.

Our national interest lies in a democratic Ukraine able to make its own decisions, and in a rules-based international system. Both considerations now require the adoption of further measures to increase the cost to Russia of its actions.

G7 heads of state issued a statement on Friday, pledging to move swiftly to impose additional sanctions on Russia. We also all undertook to prepare to move to broader, coordinated sanctions, including sectoral measures, if necessary.

Russia's accession to the International Energy Association and the OECD has been suspended, the EU has suspended visa liberalisation talks, and there will be no G8 meeting in Sochi this year but a G7 meeting without Russia in Brussels instead.

The US has previously sanctioned 39 individuals and two entities. Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Japan have also adopted similar measures. 33 individuals are subject to EU asset freezes and travel bans, and at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, a resolution was adopted suspending the voting rights of Russian members. I pay tribute to Members of this House for the role they played in that vote.

Permanent Representatives in Brussels have met today to finalise adding substantially to the list of individuals sanctioned by the European Union. Subject to final procedures, this will be officially agreed within the next half hour, and the names of those concerned published tomorrow. We are in further discussions in the EU about future steps, including preparations for a third tier of sanctions involving far-reaching economic and trade measures. These preparations are now well advanced and the European Commission has sent proposals to each member state.

Increasing the scope of the sanctions placed on Russia is the right response to the failure to implement the Geneva Agreement and the continued destabilisation of Eastern Ukraine, and in the last two hours the United States has announced it is imposing sanctions on seven Russian government officials, including two members of President Putin's inner circle, sanctions on 17 companies also linked to Putin's inner circle, and additional restrictions on 13 of those companies. And the United States has announced it has tightened policy to deny export license applications for any high-technology items that could contribute to Russia's military capabilities.

As these developments show, Russia is already paying a serious price for its actions. And the longer it breaches the independence and sovereignty of Ukraine, the heavier the price it will pay, undermining its own influence in its neighbourhood, steadily disconnecting Russia from the international community and damaging Russia's own prosperity and security over the long-term.

We have already seen the flight of over \$63 billion in capital out of Russia and the fall of the Russian stock market, and Russia's economy is now forecast to shrink this year.

The European Commission is preparing a comprehensive plan to reduce European countries' reliance on Russian energy, and the G7 Energy Ministers will meet next week to discuss ways to strengthen our collective energy security.

The Ukrainian people deserve their own opportunity to make free democratic choices, free from corruption and external interference.

We are sending experts to help improve public financial management, working with the World Bank to strengthen governance in Ukraine, we are co-hosting a Forum on Asset Recovery starting tomorrow in London to locate the proceeds of corruption, and we are helping them to support free, fair and inclusive Presidential elections on 25 May.

We have helped to secure an increase in European Union assistance to help ensure economic stability in Ukraine, bringing the total support available from existing EU budgets to over £1.4bn and we are calling for expert EU assistance to strengthen law enforcement and the rule of law.

We support IMF plans to put in place a two year programme worth potentially over \$17bn that will help Ukraine to make the reforms it urgently needs and to build a stronger and more prosperous economy for the future.

Russia's actions have caused deep alarm not only in Ukraine, but among its neighbours with Russian-speaking minorities, in particular the Baltic States.

On 16 April, NATO agreed a set of measures to provide reassurance and confidence to NATO Allies.

These include more air policing and naval missions, and deployment of additional military staff from Allied nations to strengthen NATO's preparedness, training and exercises.

The UK has contributed 4 Typhoon aircraft to boost NATO's regular Baltic Air Policing Mission, these aircraft have left today, we are contributing to AWACS reconnaissance flights over Poland and Romania, and we stand ready to provide more support as NATO's response develops.

My Rt Hon Friend the Minister for Europe is discussing these measures with colleagues in Estonia today, and I intend to travel to the region next week including to Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova.

It cannot be acceptable in Europe in the 21st century not only to invade and annex by force on the back of a sham referendum part of a neighbouring country, but to use military exercises and proxies to foment instability and disorder in that country, in an effort to disrupt its democratic elections. These are policies we have to be clear we oppose, and we must be ready to take measures which make very clear that approach.

Russia's actions betray their fear of democracy and the rule of law taking root in their neighbourhood. These actions are not consistent with being a strong and confident country, and are also in breach of international agreements and the UN Charter to which Russia is a party.

It is in Russia's power to help find ways for tensions to be reduced in Ukraine. The doors of diplomacy remain open. We will continue to talk to Russia and to urge them to seek de-escalation.

But repeated intensification of the crisis and violation of international law and refusal to implement agreements require a strong response from the international community, and the United Kingdom will be part of that, in keeping with our international responsibilities and in defence of our national interest."