



House of Commons
Foreign Affairs Committee

**The United Kingdom's
relations with Russia:
Government Response
to the Committee's
Seventh Report of
Session 2016–17**

**First Special Report
of Session 2017–19**

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The Foreign Affairs Committee

The Foreign Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and its associated public bodies.

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The current staff of the Committee are Chris Stanton (Clerk), Zoe Oliver-Watts (Second Clerk), Dr Ariella Huff (Senior Committee Specialist), Ashlee Godwin, Dr Eoin Martin and Nicholas Wade (Committee Specialists), Clare Genis (Senior Committee Assistant), James Hockaday and Su Panchanathan (Committee Assistants), and Estelle Currie (Media Officer).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Foreign Affairs Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 6105; the Committee's email address is fac@parliament.uk

First Special Report

The Foreign Affairs Committee published its Seventh Report of Session 2016-17, on [The United Kingdom's relations with Russia](#), on 2 March 2017, as House of Commons paper HC 120. The response from the Government was received on 20 July 2017 and is appended below.

Appendix: Government Response

The Government notes the Foreign Affairs Committee's report on: The United Kingdom's relations with Russia, published on 2 March 2017.

This Report sets out the Government's response to each of the Committee's conclusions and recommendations. The Committee's text is in bold and the Government's response is in plain text. Paragraph numbers refer to the Committee's report.

UK-Russia relations since 1991: Divergent perspectives

1. **From the perspective of Russia, western powers took advantage of a period of relative Russian weakness under Boris Yeltsin in the decade following the collapse of the Soviet Union to enlarge both the European Union and NATO. From the perspective of western European countries and the United States, membership of political or economic alliances is a matter for sovereign decisions by the applicant countries if they meet the criteria for membership, and Russia can have no veto on such matters. Moreover, both NATO and the European Union believe that they offered the hand of friendship to Russia in assisting in the process of economic and political reform and democratisation. That hand of friendship was rebuffed after President Putin came to power. The different narratives of Russian and western foreign policy thinking have been well documented, including in the reports of our predecessor Committees. Despite those warnings, we do not believe that our policymakers have adequately considered the full implications of the differences between western and Russian understandings of this period of history or have drawn the correct, albeit uncomfortable, conclusions from it. However, given the Russian leadership's apparent intent to develop a siege mentality, particularly for domestic purposes, it is uncertain to what extent constructive engagement would have been possible. There is also a need to understand why states on the Russian Federation's fringe feel threatened. Western, including UK, policy must accept a share of responsibility for the current state of relations.** (Paragraph 24)

The Government pays close attention to recent history and politics in analysing Russian policies. The Government's approach takes account of deep underlying differences with Russia and the fundamentally different way in which Russia interprets developments. The Government's strategic approach to Russia is underpinned by the importance it attaches to respecting and upholding the rules based international order and international law. This includes, in particular, respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries. Dialogue remains necessary in order to fully understand each other's perspectives; to

reduce the risks arising from misunderstandings; to make progress on international challenges in areas where we are engaged; and to take forward shared interests where these exist.

Russia in 2017

2. **The evidence that we received on human rights is confirmed by international groups who are concerned about attacks on civil society and disrespect for the rule of law and human rights in not only Russia itself, but Crimea. The Committee shares those concerns. (Paragraph 40)**

3. **The Kremlin is prepared to be disruptive in foreign affairs. This opportunist, tactical approach to foreign policy means that Russia is already making strategic mistakes and pursuing short-term advantages rather than advancing a long-term, coherent, sustainable vision for its role in the world. Russia rejects international rules as they are understood by the UK and other western powers, and, in an effort to legitimise its approach, it seizes on every example where we have not lived up to our own standards and takes every opportunity to take advantage of weaknesses, problems and differences within eastern Europe and NATO. It believes that it has a legitimate sphere of influence in former Soviet territory in eastern Europe, that it should have a decisive say over those states' foreign policy choices and that other nations should recognise its sphere of influence. (Paragraph 53)**

4. **The Russian assertion that it has a sphere of influence is contrary to the development of the international rules-based order over the past 50 years. UK foreign policy is predicated on a rules-based international order, international law and self-determination, as set out in the Helsinki Accords and the United Nations Charter. Russian foreign policy aims to undermine the current world order, prevent self-determination and independent decisions by neighbouring countries, which it sees as regime change, and to promote Russia's world view as a legitimate alternative to western values. The Russian Government's indifference to human rights, freedom of expression and the rule of law underpins its foreign policy challenge to the international order and lies at the root of the collapse in UK-Russia relations. (Paragraph 54)**

The Government agrees with these observations and conclusions. The Government shares the Committee's concerns over Russia's approach to international relations and its conduct in relation to human rights, freedom of expression, and the rule of law. Russian actions in Ukraine and Georgia demonstrate that Russia believes it should have a sphere of influence in the region. Russian actions have contributed to instability and a worsening in the human rights situation in both of those countries.

Tensions in the UK-Russia relationship

5. **Today the UK must not accept or recognise the illegal Russian occupation and annexation of Crimea. This is particularly important because the UK is a signatory to the Budapest Memorandum (see paragraph 55). Ukraine is a sovereign state, and it must be able to choose its own future. The UK national interest would be served if Ukraine had positive relations with both Russia and the West. However, such an**

outcome cannot be achieved until Russia ends its illegal annexation of Crimea, stops supporting separatist groups in eastern Ukraine and abides by international law. (Paragraph 71)

The Government agrees with these observations and recommendations. The Government has been clear that the UK does not, and will not, recognise the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia. The UK has repeatedly called for Russia to cease its support for separatist groups in eastern Ukraine and, together with the rest of the European Union, has made clear that sanctions will continue until Russia has met its commitments under the Minsk Agreements in full.

6. The FCO should continue to work with the EU, Canada and USA on supporting Ukraine. The UK and its allies should pursue a robust policy whereby support is conditional on Ukraine addressing domestic corruption and maladministration. In the long term, the UK and its allies should support Ukraine in developing resilience to further Russian encroachment and in building its social, political and physical infrastructure, which will facilitate further engagement with the West and allow Ukraine to engage with Russia on a level playing field. (Paragraph 79)

The UK will continue to engage closely with the EU, Canada, the USA, and other G7 countries and supporters of Ukraine. International support to Ukraine is linked to conditionality guidelines set by the IMF and the EU. Transforming Ukraine into a stable, transparent, prosperous modern state is of strategic importance. A successful Ukraine would be a source of stability in Europe and a positive model for progress in the wider region. The converse is also true: a struggling and unreformed Ukraine would be a source of instability and would be more exposed to Russian leverage.

The reform challenge which Ukraine faces is immense. It is attempting a similar reform process to that faced by other post-communist countries but in significantly more challenging conditions: the economy is still under strain; two decades of stalling on reform has resulted in a legacy of endemic corruption; and the conflict in the East continues to absorb a significant proportion of the Government's limited resources.

Despite these challenges, Ukraine has made more progress on reform since 2014 than in the previous 20 years combined, notably in reforming the energy and banking sectors, building anti-corruption institutions, improving the business climate, and improving transparency in Government. Continued international support will be crucial if Ukraine is to complete its political and economic transition. The Government remains committed to providing political and practical support to Ukraine's reform efforts. The UK and Ukraine co-hosted the Ukraine Reform Conference on 6 July 2017, which brought the Government of Ukraine and the international community together behind a renewed commitment to the reform challenge in Ukraine. The Ukraine Reform Conference provided a platform for the Government of Ukraine to set out its reform plans up until 2020 in a detailed action plan.

7. The £20 million Good Governance Fund seems woefully inadequate to address the task in hand in Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Ukraine alone would justify the investment of British resources of hundreds of millions of pounds to improve governance, if that were to secure the central objective

of supporting Ukraine as an independent country with a liberal European outlook. Support could also be provided by embedding British diplomats and experts into Ukrainian administrative structures. (Paragraph 80)

The Good Governance Fund (GGF) budget for financial year 2015/2016 was £20m. This increased to £30m for financial years 2016/2017 and 2017/2018 and will increase again to £40m for financial years 2018/19 to 2020/21, as part of the Strategic Defence and Security Review's commitment to double the existing GGF by the end of the Spending Review period; financial year 2020/21.

However, this is only part of HMG's programme and policy engagement in respect of Ukraine, which in turn is designed to complement and reinforce wider international efforts. For example, in Ukraine alone, in excess of £20m of HMG programme funding – in addition to GGF programming – will be dispersed in financial year 2017/2018, focusing on stabilisation and conflict prevention; countering dis-information; and democratisation and human rights. Several of these programme interventions include the secondment of UK Civil Servants and other experts to Ukrainian institutions. These include a Strategic Communications expert seconded to the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a UK secondee working on Donor Co-ordination and a Special Defence Advisor attached to the Ukrainian MOD.

8. The FCO must clarify whether the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement will apply to UK-Ukraine political and economic relations post-Brexit. If the UK will no longer be a party to the Association Agreement after it leaves the EU, the FCO should begin planning a successor agreement as a matter of urgency, and we invite it to set out the areas that would be covered by this agreement in its response to this Report. (Paragraph 81)

The UK continues to support the full application of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, which underpins Ukraine's reform programme. We welcome the Netherlands' recent ratification of the Agreement which will allow it to enter fully into force on 1 September 2017.

As the UK prepares to leave the EU, we are seeking to achieve continuity in our trade and investment relationships with third countries, including those – such as Ukraine – which are covered by EU Free Trade Agreements or other EU preferential arrangements. We are actively exploring ways to achieve this with our trading partners.

9. If the UK is determined to maintain a principled stance in relation to the sanctions on Russia, this may require uncomfortable conversations with close allies. The withdrawal of the existing sanctions should be linked to Russian compliance with its obligations toward Ukraine, and should not be offered in exchange for Russian co-operation in other areas. This approach would avoid ceding moral and legal legitimacy to Russia and departing from UK values and standards. The challenge in this approach is that the practical effect of economic sanctions on Russian decision-making is doubtful. It looks as though it will be increasingly difficult to sustain a united western position on sanctions, not least if they become a bargaining point during Brexit negotiations. The UK faces the possibility of becoming an isolated actor supporting a policy towards Russia that is failing. This could lead to further damage to Britain's long-term ability to influence Russia. (Paragraph 95)

The Government agrees that the removal of existing sanctions should be linked with Russia's full compliance with the Minsk Agreements and should not be offered in exchange for Russian co-operation in other areas.

The UK is far from being an isolated actor in supporting a robust approach towards the renewal of EU sanctions. The recent G7 Summit in Taormina maintained continued western unity on this issue. The EU continues to extend its sanctions measures against Russia each time these come up for renewal.

This strong and united Western response underlines a collective determination to ensure that Russia pays an enduring price for its ongoing violation of international law in Ukraine.

10. The international community must remain unified in the face of Russia's assertion of its perceived sphere of influence and its disregard for the international norms in its treatment of Ukraine. The FCO should prioritise international unity on policy towards Russia in talks with the new US Administration, and should continue to work closely with EU partners to maintain support for Ukraine, whether this is delivered through sanctions and/or assistance to Ukraine. (Paragraph 96)

The Government agrees that continued international unity is essential to combat Russia's disregard of international norms. The UK has been at the forefront of international efforts in the EU, NATO, G7, OSCE, and UN to hold Russia to account for its aggression in Ukraine.

On 6 July 2017, the UK co-hosted the Ukraine Reform Conference in London to galvanise international support for Ukraine's reform effort. International partners, including all EU Member States, G7 members and other major donors to Ukraine attended this event.

We maintain close contact at all levels with the US on the strategic challenge posed by Russia. This was discussed during the Prime Minister's visit to Washington in January 2017 and at the NATO Leaders' Summit in April 2017, and is raised regularly in the Foreign Secretary's discussions with US Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson.

11. The FCO should be open to considering any proposals that the Russian Government may advance to resolve the situation in Ukraine outside the Minsk II process that are in line with international law. Russian actions demonstrating compliance with the rule of international law in Ukraine could be linked to the gradual removal of sanctions and would provide Russia with a route map to restoring positive relations with the West. We invite the FCO in its response to this report to detail the exact responsibilities of Russia with regard to the Minsk II agreement. The measure of success in relation to sanctions is their no longer being needed. It is therefore imperative that the international community recognises the need for an achievable route to rapprochement. (Paragraph 99)

The Minsk Agreements provide the framework for resolution of the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine and the restoration of Ukrainian sovereignty over all of the Donbas. Implementation of these Agreements should remain the focus of international efforts. Russian responsibilities under the Minsk Agreements are clear: Russia must stop equipping the separatists; it must use its influence over the separatists to ensure they also meet their Minsk commitments; and it must withdraw all foreign armed formations, military equipment and mercenaries from the territory of Ukraine.

Russia is not meeting these commitments. The UK's policy on sanctions is that their application should be clearly linked to Russia's complete implementation of its commitments under the Minsk Agreements, and respect for Ukraine's sovereignty. The Government would welcome a situation in which these conditions were met and sanctions were no longer required.

12. There is currently no realistic prospect of the ICC mechanism being used to investigate and address war crimes committed in Syria. (Paragraph 118)

The Government agrees with the assessment that there is currently little prospect of the ICC mechanism being used to address war crimes committed in Syria. In May 2014, the UK co-sponsored a UN Security Council resolution to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court (ICC). Russia and China chose to veto this resolution. We continue to make the case for the situation in Syria to be referred to the ICC, but, given China and Russia's track record of vetoing UN Security Council resolutions on Syria, we accept that an ICC referral is unlikely in the near future. We also judge that there is currently little prospect of getting international agreement to establish a special international tribunal to prosecute those responsible for war crimes in Syria.

In spite of these obstacles, the Government continues to work for accountability for crimes committed in Syria. We are supporting investigations by international bodies such as the UN Independent Commission of Inquiry. We are also supporting efforts to gather evidence that may be used to hold perpetrators to account through prosecutions in national or international courts, or tribunals that have or may in the future have jurisdiction over these crimes in accordance with international law. In December 2016, we co-sponsored the UN General Assembly resolution which established the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to support the investigation and prosecution of those responsible for the most serious crimes under international law in Syria.

13. The UN inquiry into the air strike on the convoy demonstrated the challenge of establishing the intent behind an attack on a plainly civilian target in order to sustain a conclusive view on whether or not a war crime has been committed. The Russian response to these charges was consistent with its view that it is held to different standards from those to which we hold ourselves. The Government is right to call out the Russian military for actions that potentially violate International Humanitarian Law. However, if the Government continues to allege that Russia has committed war crimes in Syria without providing a basis for its charge, it risks bolstering the Kremlin's narrative that Russia is held to unfair double standards by hostile and hypocritical western powers. Un-evidenced rhetoric from both sides also makes it difficult to implement the practical co-operation measures necessary to deliver lasting peace in Syria. (Paragraph 119)

Suggestions of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) violations in Syria are a matter of grave concern. All parties in the Syrian conflict should base allegations of IHL violations on solid evidence, facilitating thorough investigation and impartial clarity. In partnership with other donor countries, we are supporting this by funding the collection of documentary evidence for use in future legal processes. Where HMG is presented with compelling evidence of IHL violations, we will encourage relevant legal authorities and multilateral institutions to investigate and adjudicate as necessary. We urge all forces party to the Syrian conflict to respect and observe IHL provisions at all times. UK endorsement

of investigation into the Syrian convoy strike was based upon the need for all parties—not just Russia—to be held accountable for actions on the ground. This parity directly refutes Russian claims of unfair treatment, and is exemplified by HMG's support to moderate Opposition groups, which is tailored to include training in Law of Armed Conflict observance. Vetoes by Russia and China in the UN Security Council have made it more difficult for the international community to hold actors to account for IHL violations in Syria. Despite the likelihood of lengthy deliberations, we continue to support the referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court, having also co-sponsored the UN General Assembly resolution establishing a new International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for investigation and prosecution relating to serious crimes under IHL. We endorse the independent UN Commission of Inquiry's investigations into human rights violations and abuses in Syria – this authority recently published its report on the siege and offensive against eastern Aleppo in the second half of last year, reminding us once again of the terrible toll inflicted on the civilians of eastern Aleppo by the regime and its Russian backers.

14. Breaches of International Humanitarian Law—with evidence of clear Russian violations in Aleppo and elsewhere in Syria—are unacceptable. Those responsible must be held accountable. Coalition failures in Afghanistan and Iraq do not permit breaches of International Humanitarian Law in Syria. (Paragraph 120)

The Government is clear that breaches of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) in Syria and elsewhere are unacceptable and rejects the suggestion that there has been any weakening of the Government's position on upholding IHL. We condemn all breaches and have repeatedly called on all parties in Syria to respect IHL. We strongly support the work of the UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria (COI) in investigating and reporting on violations of international human rights law. We led on calls for the COI to conduct a special investigation into the events in Aleppo during the second half of last year. The COI's report on Aleppo, which was published on 1 March 2017, reported that war crimes had been committed by all parties. The COI's report of 13 March 2017, which reported more widely on the situation in Syria, also concluded that it had found evidence of conduct likely to amount to war crimes. We agree that those responsible must be held accountable and will continue to support efforts aimed at achieving accountability. In December 2016, we co-sponsored the UN General Assembly resolution which established a new International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism to support the investigation and prosecution of those responsible for the most serious crimes under international law in Syria.

15. The introduction of powers in the Criminal Finances Bill to allow the civil recovery of the property of individuals involved in gross human rights abuses or violations carried out abroad is welcome and should allow the UK unilaterally to sanction Russian individuals who have committed or who have facilitated the commission of human rights abuses or war crimes in Syria. The Committee invites the Government to present its assessment of how the new powers will be exercised and to report to the House orders made against individuals. (Paragraph 121)

See answer to conclusion 21.

16. Russia and the United Kingdom have a shared interest in combating Islamist terrorism and extremism. It is difficult to envisage how to progress this shared interest

considering the differences between the two countries' respective definitions and analyses of terrorism, and acceptable methods to defeat it. Any dialogue with Russia must be handled with the greatest care, but it is at least worth exploring. The Government and its agencies should be having a regular dialogue with their Russian counterparts about the causes of Islamist extremist violence and the potential strategies to address it. This shared objective could be utilised to open constructive dialogue with Russia in the area of common shared security and anti-terrorism. That dialogue should be used to improve relations, better understand Russian foreign policy and initiate discussion on freedom of expression, the rule of law and human rights, and the ongoing issues in Crimea and eastern Ukraine. (Paragraph 130)

The Government recognises that the UK and Russia have a shared interest in countering terrorism and violent extremism in both domestic and international contexts. The UK is bound by legal provisions in several areas of relevance, not least the scope for sharing of intelligence and the permissible definitions of terrorism, terrorist entities, and proportionate use of force. Additional measures taken by HMG in response to the 2006 murder of Russian dissident Alexander Litvinenko have also restricted engagement with Russian officials on counter terrorism, particularly by limiting UK contact with Russian intelligence agencies. Despite these inhibiting factors, the Government has maintained a limited channel of communication between the UK and Russian security agencies to allow information to be shared when clearly in the national security interest of both countries, in particular around terrorism incidents, aviation security, and international sporting events such as the the European Football Championship in 2016 and the World Cup in 2018.

Our co-operation needs to take account of marked differences—both in attitudes and methodologies—between the UK and Russia on approaches to counter-terrorism and counter-extremism/radicalisation work. UK engagement will be informed by an assessment of the relative risks and opportunities afforded by security dialogue with Russia, and will also be predicated upon Russia's willingness to reciprocate.

UK policy towards Russia

17. We visited Russia in May 2016, where we met Russian Ministers, civil servants and parliamentarians. Although those exchanges were occasionally uncomfortable, we judged that some interaction with Russia is preferable to no interaction, if only to maintain the basis for a more positive relationship in future, to clarify areas of disagreement and to de-escalate points of difference. We therefore welcome recent indications that the Government is willing to consider more direct, face-to-face engagement with the Russian leadership. While engagement for engagement's sake has merit, albeit limited, in sustaining contact, it is not a substitute for dialogue with a purpose. We are not convinced that the FCO and Government Ministers have identified what Russia wants from the UK, or what, if anything, the UK should seek to accomplish through bilateral engagement with Russia. (Paragraph 141)

18. The FCO should clarify what the UK wants to achieve in its bilateral engagement with Russia. This should involve dialogue on specific issues, such as counter-terrorism, cybersecurity or aviation security, in order to establish both points of agreement and points of difference. Having established its terms of reference, the FCO should conduct

a meaningful and regular political dialogue with the Russian Government, including at the highest ministerial levels. Ministers should conduct this dialogue in a spirit of frankness and honesty, based on clear analysis of the UK's immediate and long-term strategic goals for its relationship with Russia. There is also scope for facilitating non-governmental contact in partnership with the EU and other allies. (Paragraph 142)

The Government agrees with the Committee on the need for dialogue with Russia. Whilst we continue to have significant differences with Russia, it is important that we continue to engage to avoid misunderstandings, address our disagreements, and to cooperate where it is in the UK national interest.

The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have made clear that our policy towards Russia is to 'engage but beware'. We therefore maintain senior-level contacts with Russia, including at Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary level and through official level contacts in London and Moscow.

The Government agrees on the need for dialogue on specific issues, such as Syria. As permanent members of the UN Security Council the UK and Russia have a special responsibility for global peace and security. The Government is working to establish a dialogue on issues where there is scope for at least partial alignment of our interests, such as on Afghanistan, counter-terrorism, aviation security, and the 2018 World Cup. We continue to engage on a range of other areas of UK interest including climate change and supporting UK businesses within sanctions parameters. We are committed to building stronger links between the British and Russian people, and encouraging co-operation in education, culture, and science, for example through the British Council-led 2017 Year of Science and Education.

The Government recognises the value of non-governmental contacts. The Government has supported exchanges between non-government actors (for example, between the Royal United Services Institute and the Russia International Affairs Council).

19. The UK Government must explore ways constructively to engage with Russia in order to improve its record on human rights, freedom of expression and the rule of law. The FCO must also work closely with other international partners and through the UN Security Council better to understand and to respond to the current Russian foreign policy and its 'sphere of influence' strategy. (Paragraph 143)

Pressure on non-governmental organisations and restrictive legislation, including the 'Foreign Agents' and 'Undesirable Organisations' laws, are of serious concern to the Government and we have raised these concerns directly with Russia. The Government provides financial support to programmes delivered by the Council of Europe that work with the Russian Government to tackle issues such as corruption and the rule of law.

We continue to emphasise the promotion and protection of human rights with official contacts and in high level discussions with Russia. We support projects which aim to help improve the situation on the ground and we have significantly increased the funding available to support civil society in Russia at a time when NGOs and charities are facing growing pressure.

The issue of LGBT+ rights is one that the Government raises regularly with the Russian authorities. We are particularly concerned about the reports of persecution of LGBT+

citizens in Chechnya and have called publicly for such persecution to cease, for thorough investigation, and for those responsible to be brought to justice. We have made clear our concern over the Russian law prohibiting the promotion of “non-traditional” sexual relations to minors, particularly its potential to legitimise homophobia and encourage violence against LGBT+ citizens. The Government has raised these concerns bilaterally at a number of levels since the law was passed in June 2013, and will continue to do so. FCO officials in Russia meet regularly with LGBT+ activists and attend LGBT+ events, such as Queerfest and the Side-by-Side Film Festival, to provide support. We have also provided support to organisations such as Stonewall.

The FCO regularly discusses Russia human rights issues in a wide range of international fora including the UN, EU, NATO, OSCE and G7.

20. The UK should give further consideration on how to respond, including with others in the international community, more robustly to Russia’s indifference to human rights and rule of law, which undermines the international rules-based order. (Paragraph 144)

The UK works closely with EU Member States and other countries to hold Russia to account for breaches of human rights and rule of law obligations. Together with our EU and international partners, we strongly condemn the persecution of LGBT+ persons in Chechnya. We continue to make clear, both bilaterally and multilaterally, that we expect the Russian authorities to urgently carry out a thorough investigation and bring those responsible to justice. We have made our position clear in relevant multilateral fora including the UN, the OSCE, and the Council of Europe. Russia is also listed as a country of concern in the FCO’s Annual Report on Human Rights.

21. Individuals associated with the Putin regime who are reportedly responsible for gross human rights abuses or violations use British financial and legal services, invest in British property, holiday in the UK and send their children to British schools. The UK Government could influence those people’s behaviour by introducing and utilising the civil recovery powers set out in the Criminal Finances Bill to seize assets held in the UK. The introduction of such powers would deter other Russians from committing or commissioning gross human rights abuses or violations. (Paragraph 147)

Clause 12 of the Government’s Criminal Finances Bill sends a clear statement that the UK will not stand by and allow those who have committed gross abuses and violations around the world to launder their money here in the UK. It allows for civil recovery to be undertaken in relation to property connected with gross human rights abuse or violations. It expands the definition of ‘unlawful conduct’ within Part 5 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (POCA) to include conduct by a public official that constitutes gross human rights abuse or violations (defined as torture or inhuman, cruel or degrading treatment) of a person on the grounds that they have been obtaining, exercising, defending or promoting human rights, or have sought to expose gross human rights abuse conducted by a public official.

Ultimately, it will be a matter for UK law enforcement agencies to decide which powers are justified for use on a case-by-case basis. The use of the power, as amended in the Bill, will

be subject to all the relevant safeguards in Part 5 of POCA. In particular, law enforcement agencies will need to be satisfied—and have the evidence required to satisfy a court on the ‘balance of probabilities’—that assets in the UK are the proceeds of gross human rights

22. Sanctions imposed on Russia owing to its actions in eastern Ukraine and Crimea are currently agreed and applied by EU Member States. The FCO must clarify how the UK would impose sanctions post-Brexit, explain whether Brexit would entail changes from the current sanctions regime and analyse the costs and benefits of the possible models for future UK-administered sanctions. We expect the FCO to publish its analysis of how the UK would impose sanctions post-Brexit by March 2018. (Paragraph 148)

The Government has published a White Paper setting out proposals for the UK's future legal framework for imposing and implementing sanctions after we leave the EU. We plan to publish a Government response to the consultation submissions shortly.

23. The rise of fake news in the UK is a real concern. Key questions as to RT and Sputnik's impartiality, integrity and actual news stories remain unanswered. The UK regulator should continue to take action against examples of outright falsehoods in Russian state-sponsored broadcasting. But the ability of broadcasters such as RT and Sputnik to operate in the UK should be considered a sign of British strength. Freedom of expression and freedom of the press are core British values in which the UK has justifiable confidence. These values lie at the heart of Britain's soft-power challenge to the current Russian regime. Conversely, restrictions on the operation of international and domestic media in Russia reveal the Kremlin's fear that its narrative will not prevail in free and open debate. (Paragraph 153)

The Government agrees with the Committee that the best defence against disinformation is a robust, free, wide, and varied media landscape. The UK benefits from freedom of expression and a vibrant media industry which helps to expose fake news and disinformation, as opposed to a closed system wherein broadcasters are denied the right to report in the UK.

The Russian Government persistently uses disinformation as a tool to destabilise perceived enemies. We have seen this tactic used in respect of Ukraine and Syria; including via outlets such as Russia Today (RT) and Sputnik. Internally, the Russian authorities use their control (either direct or indirect) of dominant media outlets to propagate a biased media narrative. Restrictions on the freedom of the press in Russia continue. Those who challenge the Kremlin narrative have experienced harassment and intimidation. The climate for independent and investigative journalism is heavily constrained—a number of journalists have been subjected to intimidation, assaulted, or murdered in recent years. The United Kingdom has a robust regulatory framework for broadcasting. Ofcom, the independent communications regulator, enforces this framework. The Broadcasting Code requires that news is presented with due accuracy and impartiality. Since November 2014, Ofcom has found RT in breach of requirements to preserve due impartiality in programming on five occasions.

24. We welcome the increase in funding for the BBC World Service to enhance its broadcasting into Russia and neighbouring states. Looking beyond such broadcasting,

the FCO should also increase its support for independent media in order to provide the Russian people and those living in neighbouring states with a broad range of perspectives. (Paragraph 156)

The Government agrees that support for independent media is an essential part of our response to the Kremlin's use of disinformation and propaganda.

The Russian Government has an in-built advantage in generating propaganda in the Russian-language, enjoying a dominant position in the provision of Russian language media inside and outside Russia.

The FCO-led Russian Language Programme brings together expertise from the FCO, MOD, and DFID as well as external experts to co-ordinate a set of projects worth some £70m over four years. These projects seek to enhance independent media; to engage with Russian speakers; and to expose Russian Government disinformation.

Through this programme, the Government is working with a range of partners to enhance the quality of public and independent Russian language media so that it is able to provide Russian-speakers with reliable access to accurate information. The type of support given includes mentoring with UK media organisations; consultancy on programming; funded co-productions and support for regional Russian language media initiatives.

25. UK withdrawal from the European Convention on Human Rights would risk sending a signal to Russia that it can freely disregard international human rights norms at home and abroad, and would undermine UK support for the work of human rights groups in Russia. It would also deprive the UK of a key source of soft power and influence among reformers and human rights activists in Russia. In order to maintain international standards on human rights, the UK Government should not withdraw from the ECHR and should make it clear that no such step is contemplated. (Paragraph 160)

The Government has no plans to withdraw from the European Convention on Human Rights.

Future engagement

26. The UK Government should reconsider the decrease in its grant to the British Council for its work in Russia, given the valuable work that the British Council does. (Paragraph 165)

The Government has not decreased its grant to the British Council. With the agreement of the British Council, the profile of their grant-in-aid is changing, with the proportion of overseas development assistance (ODA) funding increasing over the term of the Spending Review as the non-ODA proportion reduces to zero.

The British Council have advised that self-generated income will be used to fund some work in countries that are not eligible to receive ODA, including Russia. In 2015/16, the Council increased their earned income by three per cent (£21m).

The British Council has a strong track record of delivering impactful activity in Russia. 2016 was the UK-Russia Year of Language and Literature, during which the British

Council (working with FCO, DIT and Visit Britain) undertook numerous projects related to the English language and Shakespeare in Russia which reached 20 million Russians. 2017 is the UK-Russia Year of Science and Education, which aims to position the UK as a preferred partner for Russian science, facilitate links in areas of scientific excellence, and help UK science and business access Russian scientific expertise.

As set out in the British Council's Corporate Plan 2017–20, strengthening connections with the next generation in Russia and neighbouring countries is one of the six areas where it will prioritise its impact over the period.

27. With respect to the World Cup 2018, the FCO should:

- **facilitate co-operation between British police and their Russian counterparts to minimise the possibility that serious trouble occurs again;**
- **plan to increase its staff in Russia during the World Cup to meet the likely surge in demand for consular services;**
- **review whether it is appropriate for British Ministers and VIPs to attend World Cup 2018 only on the basis of Russia's management of the tournament itself and its commitment to fair sporting competition.**
- **The FCO should use this tournament and others to enhance and repair the wider relationship between the UK and Russia, rather than boycott sport in response to other strained aspects of UK-Russia relations.** (Paragraph 168)

Russia will host the 2018 FIFA World Cup. The FCO is leading Government preparations to ensure a safe and successful tournament. The Government agrees with the Committee's recommendation to facilitate co-operation between British and Russian police to help ensure the safety and security of British nationals travelling to Russia for the World Cup. In March 2017, the UK's Gold Policing Commander for the World Cup, Vice Constable Mark Roberts, visited Moscow and met the Russian police and a range of other stakeholders. Mark Roberts' visit was facilitated by the FCO through the British Embassy in Moscow and supported by the Home Office's Football Policing Unit. This was the first of a number of planned visits by UK police officers to Russia to discuss practical law enforcement co-operation in advance of, and during, the tournament.

The Government also agrees with the Committee's assessment that the World Cup will likely lead to an increase in demand for consular services in Russia, particularly as the tournament is the first World Cup in Europe since 2006. The FCO has a well established process for managing major international sporting events, including deploying additional consular trained staff to overseas posts to provide reinforcement and resilience. This will be the case for the Russia World Cup. The FCO is already increasing the number of consular trained staff working in our network of posts in Russia and has robust plans in place to manage any consular incidents. In June 2017 the FCO launched its "Be on the Ball" media campaign to encourage football fans to plan their trip in advance to reduce preventable consular incidents.

The qualification process for the World Cup will conclude in the autumn of 2017. The Government will consider Ministerial and VIP attendance at the World Cup in the context of Home Nations teams' qualification, and a range of other factors, in due course.

28. The FCO must once again invest in the analytical capacity to understand Russian decision-making in order to develop effective and informed foreign policy. This should involve engaging with think-tanks and universities that study Russia, recruiting and training FCO Russia specialists and developing Russian language skills in the FCO. The FCO must set out detailed plans on how it will develop its internal capacity and harness external expertise, and how that will feed into policymaking. (Paragraph 176)

The Government agrees on the importance of underpinning policy towards Russia with the necessary analytical capability, including that provided by the FCO's Research Analysts, and will continue to invest accordingly in maintaining and developing Research Analysts' in-depth long-term expertise on Russia. Research Analysts will continue, as at present, to act as the FCO's main gateway for engagement with external UK-based expertise on Russia, ensuring that policy-making is informed by a range of expert views on Russia from outside of government.

Following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, the FCO significantly expanded staffing in the British Embassy in Kyiv and the Eastern Europe and Central Asia Directorate (EECAD) in London. The January 2015 meeting of the National Security Council on a new Russia Strategy committed the Government to develop our expertise on Russia. This led to the creation of the "EECADRE", focused on appointing officers with regional experience to key Russia posts and developing FCO Russian Expertise. The outcome of the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) gave further impetus to this work. This needs to be a long term investment. These challenges will remain with us for the next decade and beyond. The Government therefore believes it is essential that the whole of Government builds its Russia expertise, not only in the FCO.

The EECADRE, launched in 2015, has two key objectives: recruiting and retaining a strong network of officials who develop successful careers anchored in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA) region; and building a deep understanding of the region enabling the network to develop and deliver first rate policy. To achieve this, it is focusing efforts on three areas; Language: improving the FCO language offer, increasing ongoing support and encouraging the uptake of Russian and other regional languages; Knowledge: developing expertise on the EECA region through greater provision of bespoke courses and greater access of outside expertise; Appointments: improving the pipeline of officials with relevant EECA experience into the right jobs and helping them to build a strong EECA career anchor. Results to date have included: increased provision of language training for those learning Russian; increased and systematic engagement with external analysts on Russia; and the holding of an annual Wilton Park Conference to build up expertise for officials dealing with Russia policy. Additionally, half of the Ambassadors in EECA countries are serving as their second spell as Head of Mission in this region, demonstrating how expertise is being developed and drawn on.

This has led to a greater emphasis on knowledge and language in the network and throughout the FCO. EECA policy-making draws on network and external expertise. Strategies in other policy areas, such as Libya, also contain Russian components and understanding. There has been a gradual improvement in language attainment scores and we expect further improvement as new extended language training times are phased in.

29. The portfolio of the Minister of State for Europe and the Americas at the FCO is too broad to be covered effectively by any single individual. Our impression is that active policy responsibility remains principally the preserve of the Foreign Secretary and it would have been fairer for him to give evidence to the Committee on behalf of the Government. Bearing in mind the ongoing tensions in the UK-Russia relationship and its long-term importance to our security, the policy area would merit the appointment of a junior FCO Minister with more specific responsibility for Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), with sufficient resources to carry out the role. (Paragraph 180)

Russia is a foreign policy priority for the UK Government. The Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary, and relevant Cabinet Ministers are fully engaged. Russia is discussed regularly by the National Security Council. The Minister for Europe and the Americas has the lead for Russia policy within the FCO: the Government believes that the current arrangement of policy responsibilities amongst FCO Ministers allows sufficient Ministerial attention to be given to the strategic challenge posed by Russia.

30. The FCO must look beyond President Putin and develop a long-term strategy to engage with the Russian people and to articulate a credible, positive vision of the relationship that the UK would like to develop with Russia. In particular, the FCO should resource more fellowships and exchanges between British and Russian academic institutions, as well as organisations for young professionals, to promote the development of shared values and mutual understanding between British and Russian people. The UK should also build links with Russian SMEs and entrepreneurs with an eye to promoting closer economic co-operation with Russia when the time is right. A people-to-people strategy building bridges with the next generation of Russian political and economic leaders could underpin improved UK-Russia relations in the future. (Paragraph 187)

The Government agrees with this recommendation. Notwithstanding current difficulties, the Government is committed to long-term support for those individuals and institutions who can contribute positively to future developments in Russia. In 2017/18 we will be increasing the number of Chevening Scholarships available to Russian students from 13 to 30. We are also funding John Smith Fellowships to build bridges with the next generation of Russian leaders. We will be supporting new UK-Russian exchanges in the fields of science, economics, and culture and, during the course of the year, we will increase the level of funding available to civil society organisations working to protect and promote democracy and human rights.