The Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP  
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs  
Foreign & Commonwealth Office  
King Charles Street, London, SW1A 2AH

18 June 2019

Dear Jeremy,

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) suspended Russia’s representatives in 2014, in protest against Russia’s annexation of Crimea. Subsequent steps by Russia, including not presenting credentials for a new delegation and not paying their fees, mean that Russia is excluded from the Council.

I am aware that there is a report being presented to the next part session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on Tuesday 25 June that proposes rule changes designed to facilitate the re-entry of Russia into the PACE – effectively without pre-conditions or concessions.

Could I ask the FCO to clarify:

- Whether it is the FCO’s policy to seek to ensure Russia’s compliance – prior to any re-admission – with its legal obligation to pay funds long overdue, and with the Convention on Human Rights?
- Whether, when, and under what exact conditions, the FCO would support the re-admission of Russia to the PACE and how those conditions will be imposed?

I ask that we receive your reply by 24 June so that we can publish it in time for the PACE meeting that week.

Tom Tugendhat MP  
Chair

Copied to:  
The Rt Hon Sir Roger Gale MP  
Leader of the UK Delegation  
Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
24 June 2019

Tom Tugendhat MP
Chair, Foreign Affairs Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Tom,

The UK does not and will never recognise Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea – the action that precipitated the removal of Russia’s voting rights in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE).

We have consistently called on Russia to abide by its freely entered into and legally binding obligation to pay outstanding contributions in full. Therefore, we have been clear that any submission of credentials by the Russian PACE delegation must be preceded by full Russian payment of its debts to the Council of Europe (CoE). My officials raised this last week with Russian officials. We have also reached out to key international partners in order to bolster our message.

In addition, we are clear that membership of the CoE comes with responsibilities and obligations beyond payment. This includes abiding by all aspects of the European Convention on Human Rights. We have made clear in statements in the Committee of Ministers and in discussions with Russian and other officials that we expect Russia to fulfil all its CoE obligations.

Although we have made our position clear, we have no direct influence over the outcome. The proposed rules change, on which a vote will be held on 24 June, is a matter for the Parliamentary Assembly, who are independent parliamentarians, not the intergovernmental arm of the CoE. While respecting the independence of our parliamentarians, our Ambassador to the CoE does meet with UK parliamentarians regularly to discuss issues of common interest. Our Ambassador also discusses this issue regularly with international partners in Strasbourg.

Russia has remained a member of the CoE throughout. I note that the CoE is one of the few ways available to the international community to hold Russia to account for its human rights violations. The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) is, for many Russian citizens, the only chance they have of obtaining redress.

On that basis, the UK did not obstruct decision-making at the May 2019 Helsinki Ministerial. The Ministerial sent a signal to PACE that a solution to the impasse
should be found but left the final decision on rules change to PACE. Our assessment is that the alternative to the path agreed at Helsinki could have raised the risk of a Russian departure from the CoE, and a loss of our ability to hold Russia to account through the ECtHR. Any Russian return to PACE would not be seen by us, or the CoE, as legitimisation of Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea.

Regardless of whether Russia returns to PACE, we will continue our efforts to use the Council of Europe to call out hostile and malign Russian behaviour, including its abuses of human rights and violations of the rule of law. Recent examples include calling on Russia to make progress in implementing ECtHR judgements in Committee of Ministers sessions; underscoring at the annual Ministerial meeting last month our support for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia and Ukraine within their internationally-recognised borders; and participating in EU statements calling out human rights violations of LGBT people in Chechnya.

THE RT HON JEREMY HUNT MP