

**Assemblée générale  
Conseil de sécurité**

Distr. générale  
10 mars 2023  
Français  
Original : anglais

**Assemblée générale  
Soixante-dix-septième session**

Point 99 l) de l'ordre du jour

**Désarmement général et complet : application  
de la Convention sur l'interdiction de la mise au point,  
de la fabrication, du stockage et de l'emploi des armes  
chimiques et sur leur destruction**

**Conseil de sécurité  
Soixante-dix-huitième année**

**Lettre datée du 6 mars 2023, adressée au Secrétaire général  
et au Président du Conseil de sécurité par le Représentant  
permanent de la Fédération de Russie auprès de l'Organisation  
des Nations Unies**

Je voudrais porter à votre attention le rapport intitulé « Salisbury: five years of unanswered questions », publié par l'ambassade de la Fédération de Russie au Royaume-Uni en lien avec l'empoisonnement présumé des citoyens russes Sergei Skripal et Yulia Skripal à Salisbury (Royaume-Uni), le 4 mars 2018 (voir annexe).

Comme on le souligne de manière exhaustive dans le rapport susmentionné, la Fédération de Russie s'est dite prête à dialoguer avec les autorités compétentes du Royaume-Uni afin d'établir les faits dans cet épisode impliquant des citoyens russes et dont les circonstances demeurent largement inexpliquées. Toutefois, de nombreuses questions posées par notre pays à cet égard restent sans réponse et l'accès consulaire à nos citoyens n'a pas été assuré.

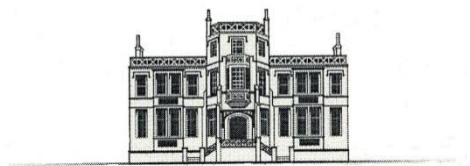
Je tiens à réaffirmer que la Fédération de Russie rejette catégoriquement toute accusation infondée tendant à l'impliquer dans l'empoisonnement en question, colportée par les fonctionnaires et les médias de certains États, et insiste pour que les autorités compétentes du Royaume-Uni apportent des réponses détaillées à toutes les questions posées (qui sont énumérées dans l'annexe au rapport susmentionné).

Je vous serais obligé de bien vouloir faire distribuer le texte de la présente lettre et de son annexe comme document de l'Assemblée générale, au titre du point 99 l) de l'ordre du jour, et du Conseil de sécurité.

(Signé) Vassily Nebenzia



**Annexe à la lettre datée du 6 mars 2023 adressée  
au Secrétaire général et au Président du Conseil de sécurité  
par le Représentant permanent de la Fédération de Russie  
auprès de l'Organisation des Nations Unies**



**Embassy of the Russian Federation  
to the United Kingdom**

**SALISBURY:  
FIVE YEARS OF  
UNANSWERED QUESTIONS**

**March 2023**

## Introduction

Five years ago, on 4 March 2018, Sergei and Yulia Skripal were reportedly poisoned with a nerve agent in Salisbury, Wiltshire. The UK government has accused the Russian state of being responsible for the poisoning. Russia has denied any involvement. The incident has caused major international repercussions, severely undermining Russia-UK and Russia-West relations and becoming one of the initial elements of a massive and orchestrated campaign aimed at discrediting our country. Yet details of what actually happened remain unclear and there are no credible explanations in sight.

The Russian Embassy pays tribute to those who helped the two Russian nationals affected, first and foremost to first responders and medical staff. We also commend the efforts of journalists, bloggers and members of the public who have been working tirelessly to ensure that truth over what happened is established and made public, despite the extremely difficult media environment imposed by the British authorities and outrageous efforts to spread disinformation by various actors.

This report is an updated version of our previous publication, *“Salisbury: Two Years of Unanswered Questions”*, of 4 March 2020.

## **A. FACTS**

### **I. Background: the Skripal family**

For the reader's convenience, it is useful to begin with some background information on the individuals involved.

**Sergei Viktorovich Skripal**, born in 1951, was a career officer at the Military Intelligence Directorate (GRU), the intelligence branch of the Soviet Defence Ministry. For some time, he was the director of the GRU Department of Personnel.

In 1995 Sergei Skripal was recruited by the Secret Intelligence Service of the United Kingdom (MI6). In 2004 he was arrested, and in 2006 sentenced to 13 years' imprisonment for espionage. In 2010 he was pardoned by the President of the Russian Federation Dmitry Medvedev and was freed along with three other spies as part of a swap for ten Russian citizens arrested in the United States.

After being pardoned, Mr Skripal moved to the United Kingdom and resided in Salisbury, Wiltshire, while retaining his Russian citizenship. According to UK authorities, he has also obtained British citizenship.

**Yulia Sergeievna Skripal**, born in 1985, is a daughter of Sergei Skripal. Until March 2010, she lived in Moscow. In 2010 she moved to the United Kingdom with her father, but returned to Moscow five years later. She came to Salisbury to visit her father occasionally.

Among Sergei and Yulia Skripal's living relatives is **Viktoria Valerievna Skripal**, born in 1972, daughter of Sergei's deceased brother Valery and thus Sergei's niece and Yulia's cousin. She resides in Yaroslavl, a regional capital 250 km north-east of Moscow.

### **II. The 4 March 2018 incident and initial reaction**

**On 5 March 2018 at 11:09** the Salisbury District Hospital announced on Twitter: “[We are] currently dealing with a major incident involving a small number of casualties, with a multi-agency response”.

At **13:02** Wiltshire Police declared “a major incident after it is suspected that two people have been exposed to an unknown substance in Salisbury”.

According to the Police, they had received a call at **approx. 16:15 on 4 March** “regarding concern for the welfare of a man and a woman” in The Maltings shopping centre in Salisbury. They added: “Both are currently in a critical condition. At this stage it is not yet clear if a crime has been committed [...] We do not believe there is any risk to the wider public”.

Towards the evening, the Police said that the two victims were “a man aged in his 60s and a woman aged in her 30s”. “The pair, who we believe are known to each other, did not have any visible injuries”. Several streets in central Salisbury, the Zizzi restaurant and the Bishop's Mill pub were cordoned off.

The same evening, BBC reported that the male victim was Sergei Skripal. It was later reported that the female victim was his daughter Yulia.

**On 6 March** the investigation was transferred to the **National Counter Terrorism Policing Network**, yet no terrorist incident was declared.

The same day, the **Russian Embassy** in London sent a note verbale to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO, now – Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, FCDO), inviting an official comment from the government on the incident with Mr and Ms Skripal, any information on their condition and the circumstances that led them to being hospitalised. **The Embassy invited British authorities “to ensure maximum transparency of the investigation as a necessary condition of public trust in its outcomes”**. The Embassy informed the FCO of the request it had received from Viktoria Skripal to provide information on the condition of her relatives.

Later that day, **UK Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson**, while responding to an urgent question in the House of Commons, said: *“Hon. Members will note the echoes of the death of Alexander Litvinenko in 2006. Although it would be wrong to prejudge the investigation, I can reassure the House that, should evidence emerge that implies state responsibility, Her Majesty’s Government will respond appropriately and robustly [...] I say to governments around the world that no attempt to take innocent life on UK soil will go either unsanctioned or unpunished”*.

The same day, **Russian President’s Spokesman Dmitry Peskov** said that **Russia has no information** on what had happened or possible causes of the “tragic situation”. He added that Russia had received no requests but was always open to cooperation.

**On 7 March Metropolitan Police** confirmed that the Skripals’ had been exposed to a **nerve agent** and that scientific tests by Government experts **had identified the specific nerve agent**.

**On 8 March** UK Home Secretary **Amber Rudd** said in a statement that the victims *“are understood to be Sergei and Yulia Skripal”*. *“Both remain unconscious, and in a critical but stable condition”*. She also announced that a police officer (later identified at Detective Sergeant Nick Bailey) *“has also fallen seriously ill [...] his condition remains serious but stable, and he is conscious, talking and engaging”*. She added that *“samples from the victims have been tested by experts at the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory at Porton Down. [...] Forensic analysis has revealed the presence of a nerve agent, and the incident is therefore being treated as attempted murder”*.

**On 9 March Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov** said: *“If anyone is interested in **Russia’s assistance in any investigation** [...] we will be prepared to consider such possibility, if we have the respective data. But to achieve that, you have to make contact in a professional manner through existing channels, rather than run to TV with baseless accusations”*.

**On 11 March** the **Foreign Office** informed the Russian Embassy that *“Yulia Skripal remains in a critical, but stable condition in intensive care after being exposed to a nerve agent. As Sergei Skripal is a British citizen we are unable to provide information on his condition to the Embassy”*.

**On 12 March** the Russian Ambassador, **Alexander Yakovenko**, was summoned by Foreign Secretary **Boris Johnson**. The Foreign Secretary said that the nerve agent used against Mr and Ms Skripal had been identified as “**A-234**” and that, according to the UK assessment, **it was highly likely that Russia was responsible for the attack**. He invited Russia to respond, before the end of the next day, whether this was a direct act by the Russian State or acknowledge that the Russian government had lost control of this nerve agent. He also demanded Russia to provide full and complete disclosure of its chemical weapons programme to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

Later that day **Prime Minister Theresa May** made a statement in Parliament. She said: *“It is now clear that Mr Skripal and his daughter were poisoned with a **military-grade nerve agent of a type developed by Russia**. It is part of a group of nerve agents known as “**Novichok**”. Based on the positive identification of this chemical agent by world-leading experts at the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory at Porton Down, our knowledge that Russia has previously produced this agent and would still be capable of doing so, Russia’s record of conducting state-sponsored assassinations and our assessment that Russia views some defectors as legitimate targets for assassinations, **the Government have concluded that it is highly likely that Russia was responsible for the act against Sergei and Yulia Skripal**. There are, therefore, only two plausible explanations for what happened in Salisbury on 4 March: either this was a direct act by the Russian state against our country; or the Russian Government lost control of their potentially catastrophically damaging nerve agent and allowed it to get into the hands of others. [...] This action has happened against a backdrop of a well-established pattern of Russian state aggression”. She added: “**Should there be no credible response, we will conclude that this action amounts to an unlawful use of force by the Russian state against the United Kingdom**, and I will come back to this House to set out the full range of measures that we will take in response”.*

**On 13 March** the **Russian Embassy** responded by a note verbale which said that “**the Russian Federation was not involved in any way in the incident that took place in Salisbury on 4 March**”. The Embassy demanded that samples of the chemical substance be provided to Russian experts. It reiterated the demand for a transparent investigation. The Embassy added: *“In case the British Side does not fulfil the above demands, the **Russian Side will assume that the Salisbury incident is a blatant provocation by the British authorities aimed at discrediting Russia**”.*

The same day, **Foreign Minister Lavrov** said that rather than issuing a 24-hours ultimatum, the UK could have engaged Russia under the procedure of Article IX of the **Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC)** which foresees a reply to be given within 10 days: *“I assure you, **if the Convention procedures are fulfilled, the Russian Federation will comply with its obligations and will reply to the request so made in the time prescribed**”.*

**On 14 March Ambassador Yakovenko** was again summoned to the FCO. Director General for Consular and Security affairs Philip Barton handed over a note verbale and a list of **23 staff members of the Russian Embassy declared “persona non grata”** by the British side, who were to leave the country by 21 March, and informed of the decision to reduce the Embassy’s military section to a single military attaché. He also pointed out that additional measures would be set out by the Prime Minister the same day.

In her statement to Parliament the **Prime Minister** said: *“The Russian Government have provided no credible explanation that could suggest that they lost control of their nerve agent, no explanation as to how this agent came to be used in the United Kingdom, and no explanation as to why Russia has an undeclared chemical weapons programme in contravention of international law. Instead it has treated the use of a military-grade nerve agent in Europe with sarcasm, contempt and defiance.*

***There is no alternative conclusion other than that the Russian state was culpable for the attempted murder of Mr Skripal and his daughter, and for threatening the lives of other British citizens in Salisbury, including Detective Sergeant Nick Bailey. This represents an unlawful use of force by the Russian state against the United Kingdom”.***

The following measures in response were announced by Mrs May:

- to expel 23 Russian diplomats “identified as undeclared intelligence officers”;
- to suspend all planned high-level contacts between the UK and Russia;
- to propose new legislative powers to harden defences against hostile state activity;
- to consider whether there is a need for new counter-espionage powers;
- to table an amendment to the Sanctions Bill to strengthen powers to impose sanctions in response to the violation of human rights;
- to make full use of existing powers to enhance efforts to monitor and track the intentions of those travelling to the UK;
- to freeze Russian State assets in case they may be used to threaten the life or property of UK nationals or residents;
- to deploy a range of tools from across the full breadth of the National Security apparatus in order to counter the threats of hostile state activity.

The same day, the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation** issued a statement saying: *“The March 14 statement made by British Prime Minister Theresa May [...] constitutes an **unprecedented, flagrant provocation** that undermines the foundations of normal dialogue between our countries. [...] Instead of completing its own investigation and using established international formats and instruments, including within the framework of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons – in which **we were prepared to cooperate** – the British Government opted for confrontation with Russia.*

**On 16 March Foreign Minister Lavrov** said: *“Russia not only can, but is doing more [on the Salisbury incident] than anyone, including the UK. [...] The fact that they are categorically refusing to send a formal request [...] means that they realize that they have no formal ground to go along the legal path”. “The gist of the British rhetoric is that they are not obliged to prove anything to anyone”.* He added that, according to Western-published scientific papers, work on the substance that the UK calls “Novichok” is going on in the USA, the UK, the Czech Republic, Sweden.

**On 17 March UK Ambassador UK to Russia Laurie Bristow** was summoned to the Foreign Ministry, where the following decisions of the Russian side were announced:



- 23 diplomatic staff of the UK Embassy in Moscow are declared “persona non grata” and are to leave Russia within a week;
- the UK Consulate General in St Petersburg is to be closed, thus leaving the UK with one consulate in Russia, and Russia with one consulate in the UK;
- due to the unregulated status of the British Council in the Russian Federation, its activities are terminated.

### III. Reaction of the UK’s partners

**On 15 March 2018** the leaders of France, Germany, the United States and the United Kingdom issued a joint statement sharing the British assessment that it was highly likely that Russia was responsible for the attack and that there is no plausible alternative explanation.

**Between 12 and 28 March** Theresa May made telephone calls with the Presidents of the United States (twice) and France (twice), the Chancellor of Germany (twice), the Prime Ministers of Canada, Australia, Italy, Poland, Japan and Luxembourg to discuss the Salisbury incident.

**On 19 March** the EU Foreign Affairs Council made a statement condemning the attack against Sergei and Yulia Skripal and expressing its unqualified solidarity with the UK.

**On 22 March** the European Council published its conclusions on the Salisbury incident agreeing with the United Kingdom government's assessment that it is highly likely that the Russian Federation is responsible and that there is no plausible alternative explanation.

Over the next days, in total 150 staff members of Russian diplomatic missions in 28 countries and the Mission to NATO have been **expelled**. Those countries are: Albania (2 diplomats expelled), Australia (2), Belgium (1), Canada (4), Croatia (1), Czech Republic (3), Denmark (2), Estonia (1), Finland (1), France (4), Germany (4), Georgia (1), Hungary (1), Ireland (1), Italy (2), Latvia (1), Lithuania (3), Macedonia (1), Moldova (3), Montenegro (1), Netherlands (2), Norway (1), Poland (4), Romania (1), Spain (2), Sweden (1), Ukraine (13), United States (60), as well as NATO (10). Six EU countries did not expel diplomats but recalled their ambassadors to Russia for consultations.

Russia reciprocated by a symmetrical expulsion of diplomats of the countries concerned and insisted that the total number of employees of the UK missions in Russia to the same size as that of Russian missions in the UK.

Comments made by high officials of the countries concerned include the following:

- **Czech Republic President, Miloš Zeman**, said in an interview on 29 March: *“So far the UK has not presented any evidence. There are suspicions, but as you know, suspicions are not evidence. I understand the essence of the solidarity act, but I would like to see proof as well. [...] Listen, what does ‘highly likely’ mean? I would like to have on my desk if not direct, at least indirect evidence”*. Czech Deputy Foreign Minister Jakub Dürer has been quoted as saying: *“When it comes to the UK position, we completely trust our British partner. You don’t doubt your friend, especially when the argument is supported by a phrase like ‘highly likely’”*.



- **Bulgaria's Prime Minister, Boyko Borissov**, said at a press conference on 30 March: *"Bulgaria has shown full solidarity with the United Kingdom by voting at the European Council [...] We are waiting for more evidence, if any exists, and for the moment we don't believe we have to expel Russian diplomats"*.

- **Poland's Deputy Foreign Minister, Bartosz Cichocki**, was quoted by the Sunday Express on 8 April as saying: *"In our case, the depth of the UK's information wasn't critical because we had been observing patterns of Russian behaviour and what happened in Salisbury fitted into that pattern"*.

#### IV. Timeline of further events

**On 19 March 2018 Russian President Vladimir Putin** said: *"I guess, any reasonable person realised that **this is complete absurd and nonsense**. For anybody in Russia to allow themselves such actions on the eve of the presidential election and the football World Cup? This is unthinkable". He added: "**We are ready to cooperate**. We said it at the very beginning. We are ready to participate in the necessary investigations, **but this requires an interest from the other side**, and that's what we don't see at this stage"*.

**On 22 March** Detective Sergeant Nick Bailey was discharged from hospital.

**On 28 March** the Police announced that *"at this point in our investigation, we believe the Skripals first came into contact with the nerve agent from their **front door**"*.

**On 29 March** Dr Salisbury District Hospital announced an improvement in the condition of *Yulia Skripal who was no longer in a critical condition*.

**On 31 March** Russia formally proposed a joint investigation into the Salisbury incident.

**On 3 April** a formal **request for legal assistance** was sent to the Home Office from the General Prosecutor's Office of the Russian Federation pursuant to a criminal investigation opened in Russia with regard to the attempted murder.

**On 5 April** in a telephone conversation with Viktoria Skripal aired on Russian TV, **Yulia Skripal said**: *"Everything is fine, everything is solvable, **everybody is recovering**, everybody is alive, [Sergei Skripal] is fine, he is currently sleeping"*. **The same day, Metropolitan Police published a statement on behalf of Ms Skripal** in which she said: *"**I woke up over a week ago now and am glad to say my strength is growing daily**"*.

**On 6 April** the Hospital announced that **Sergei Skripal** was ***no longer in a critical condition***".

**On 10 April** The Hospital announced **Yulia Skripal's discharge**.

**On 11 April** a statement was published by Metropolitan Police on behalf of Ms Skripal, saying: *"I have left my father in [the hospital's] care, and he is still seriously ill. I too am still suffering with the effects of the nerve agent used against me"*. She added, *"I want to stress that no one speaks for me, or for my father, but ourselves. I thank my cousin Viktoria for her concern for us, but ask that she does not visit me or try to contact me for the time being"*. The Russian Embassy questioned the authenticity of the statement.

**On 13 April** the UK published a **letter** of the same date by the National Security Adviser **Mark Sedwill** to NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg. The letter purports to provide NATO allies with “*further information regarding [UK’s] assessment that it is highly likely that the Russian state was responsible for the Salisbury attack*”. The letter contains the following new allegations:

- Nerve agents known as “Novichoks” were developed in the Soviet Union in the 1980s. “*Russia further developed some Novichoks after ratifying the CWC. In the mid-2000s, **President Putin** was closely involved in the Russian chemical weapons programme*”.
- “*During the 2000s, **Russia commenced a programme** to test means of delivering chemical warfare agents [...] including by **application to door handles***”. Small quantities of “Novichoks” were produced and stockpiled under the programme.
- In 2013 **e-mail accounts of Yulia Skripal** were “*targeted by GRU cyber specialists*”.

**The Russian Embassy** reacted by saying that the letter “*is a further demonstration of the lack of any evidence of Russia’s involvement*”. It referred to UK secret services’ “*huge track record of misleading the government and the public, with disastrous consequences*”, and asked the following questions to the allegations in Mr Sedwill’s letter:

- If the UK had information of Russia’s unlawful chemical weapons programme, why didn’t it raise the matter in 2017 when the OPCW certified the full destruction of Russia’s CW?
- If the UK had information of Russian experiments with applying CW to door handles, why did the police not focus on Mr Skripal’s door handle from the very beginning of the investigation?
- How could the UK possibly learn of GRU’s alleged interest towards Ms Skripal’s emails?

**On 17 April** the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs of the UK announced a **launch of decontamination** of the nine allegedly contaminated sites in Salisbury. The Russian Embassy reacted by saying that the so-called decontamination is an element of the strategy aiming to destroy the important and valuable evidence.

**On 1 May** National Security Adviser Sir Mark Sedwill told the Commons Defence Committee that the British Police and intelligence agencies had **failed so far to identify the individual or individuals** who carried out the nerve agent attack in Salisbury.

**On 8 May** the Prime Minister's official spokesman said: “*The police have now released all the sites for decontamination, except for the Skripal house. [...] **The ongoing investigation is one of the largest and most complex ever undertaken** by counter-terrorism policing. Over 250 officers from across the counter-terrorism policing network have been deployed, alongside over 160 officers from Wiltshire Police and a range of experts and partners. Officers continue to trawl through over 5,000 hours of CCTV and examine over 1,350 exhibits that have been seized. Around 500 witnesses have been identified and hundreds of statements have been taken.*”

The Russian Embassy reacted by saying: “*Despite huge efforts **the police have been unable to support the official political version of the incident with facts and proof**. The immense work of the police turns out to be meaningless when they are expected not to establish the truth, but to follow the artificial script written by the Conservative government days after the attack.*”

**On 10 May** Ambassador Alexander Yakovenko met with Director General Philip Barton at the FCO. The Ambassador stated that the whole range of circumstances around the Salisbury incident involving Sergei and Yulia Skripal compel Russia **to qualify the situation as a forced detention or even abduction of the two Russian nationals**. The Ambassador demanded that the United Kingdom comply with its obligations **by providing Russia consular access to the Skripals**.

**On 18 May Sergei Skripal was discharged from hospital**. A Met Police spokesman said: *“In the interests of Sergei and Yulia’s safety, we will not be discussing any protective or security arrangements that are in place.”*

**President Putin** said: *“I hope he will live a healthy and safe life. As to the investigation, on our part we have offered every assistance in the investigation to our British partners on a number of occasions, and asked for access to this investigation. There has been no response so far. Our proposals remain in place.”*

**On 23 May Yulia Skripal gave video address, published by Reuters**. She requested to be respected and expressed a willingness to eventually return to Russia. She expressed gratitude to the Russian Embassy in the UK, which had offered her assistance, but explained that “she doesn’t wish to avail herself of their services”.

On the same day **the Embassy reacted** by saying that *“We are glad to have seen Yulia Skripal alive and well. However, the video shown only strengthens our concerns as to the conditions in which Yulia Skripal is being held. Obviously, Yulia was reading a pre-written text.... **the text was a translation from English and had been initially written by a native English-speaker**... With all respect for Yulia’s privacy and security, this video does not discharge the UK authorities from their obligations under Consular Conventions”*.

**On 25 May President Putin** on the margins of the 22<sup>nd</sup> St Petersburg International Economic Forum said: *“As for this unpleasant event [Salisbury incident], we have spoken on this subject more than once. [...]”*

*We should either conduct a comprehensive and objective joint investigation, or stop talking about it because it will only worsen our relations”*.

**On 29 June Foreign Minister Lavrov** in his interview with Channel 4 said: *“...It is an act of crime. We from the very beginning suggested that we investigate this together, because it is our citizen. [...] We asked so many questions, including the questions related to the Chemical Weapons Convention’s procedures. In response, we were told that the British side does not want to listen, because we have to tell them only one thing. “Did Putin order this or did Putin lose control over the people who did?”. [...] The inconsistencies in the situation with the Skripals are very troubling. We have never managed to get consular access to our citizen in violation of all international conventions on diplomatic and consular relations. We never got any credible explanation why the cousin of Yulia Skripal has not been given visa, she wants to visit the UK and see her cousin. [...] The policeman became miraculously fine. The Skripals became miraculously fine. People are now talking about levelling the house and that of the policeman. It all looks like a persistent physical destruction of evidence, as it has been done to the benches in the park [...] It all looks very weird...”*.

**On 30 June Dawn Sturgess, 44, and Charlie Rowley, 45, were found unconscious at a house in Amesbury**, a town 7 miles from Salisbury. **On 8 July Dawn Sturgess died in hospital, two days later**

Charlie Rowley regained consciousness and subsequently was discharged from hospital. Later, Sergei and Yulia Skripal were designated as core participants in the Public Inquiry into death of Dawn Sturgess, which was launched in March 2022.

**On 5 September** the Met police declared it identified two Russian citizens, **Alexander Petrov and Ruslan Boshirov**, as those responsible for the poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal. **The police** released CCTV footage showing Petrov and Boshirov in Salisbury at 11.58 a.m. on 4 March, claiming this was “moments before the attack”.

**The same day Sue Hemming**, Crown Prosecution Service Director of Legal Services, said: *“Prosecutors from CPS Counter Terrorism Division have considered the evidence and have concluded there is sufficient evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction and it is clearly in the public interest to charge Alexander Petrov and Ruslan Boshirov, who are Russian nationals, with the following offences:*

- *Conspiracy to murder Sergei Skripal;*
- *Attempted murder of Sergei Skripal, Yulia Skripal and Nick Bailey;*
- *Use and possession of Novichok contrary to the Chemical Weapons Act;*
- *Causing grievous bodily harm with intent to Yulia Skripal and Nick Bailey.*

*We will not be applying to Russia for the extradition of these men as the Russian constitution does not permit extradition of its own nationals. Russia has made this clear following requests for extradition in other cases. Should this position change then an extradition request would be made.*

*We have, however, obtained a European Arrest Warrant which means that if either man travels to a country where an EAW is valid, they will be arrested and face extradition on these charges for which there is no statute of limitations.”*

**On 13 September** Alexander Petrov and Ruslan Boshirov appeared on Russian TV. They confirmed visiting London and Salisbury between 2 and 4 March as tourists, and described the circumstances of their two trips to Salisbury on 3 and 4 March.

**On 25 September**, the Russian Embassy received a reply from the Home Office informing the Russian side of a **refusal to fulfil the requests for legal assistance**.

**On 26 September**, the investigative website Bellingcat announced that it has identified Ruslan Boshirov as “GRU Colonel Anatoliy Chepiga”. On 8 October, they said they have identified Alexander Petrov as “Dr. Alexander Mishkin, Hero of Russia”.

**On 22 November**, the Police published three **CCTV video clips**, totaling 54 seconds, showing Petrov and Boshirov in Salisbury, at the same locations where they were earlier shown on still pictures.

**On 19 January 2019**, Spire FM, a Salisbury-based radio, reported that the 16-year-old Abigail McCourt was the first person to help Sergei and Yulia Skripal when they fell unconscious. Abigail

was passing by together with her mother, **Colonel Alison McCourt, Chief Nursing Office of the Army.**

**On 21 January, the EU Council introduced sanctions** against “GRU officer Anatoliy Chepiga (a.k.a. Ruslan Boshirov)”, “GRU Officer Alexander Mishkin (a.k.a. Alexander Petrov)”, as well as against Head of the GRU, Igor Kostyukov, and his First Deputy, Vladimir Alexeyev, the latter two being described as “responsible for the possession, transport and use in Salisbury during the weekend of 4 March 2018 of the toxic nerve agent “Novichok” by officers from the GRU.”

**18 February** – an Embassy Note Verbale is sent to the Foreign Office, requesting information on the investigation of the Salisbury case.

**16 April** – “The Independent” published an article referring to a leak in the “New York Times” that the CIA director Gina Haspel had to show the US President Donald Trump pictures of hospitalized children and dead ducks exposed to a nerve agent in order to convince him to expel 60 Russian diplomats from the United States. According to the media, these photos were presented as proof of the “sloppy work” of the operatives.

**4 June** – BBC published a video report from DSTL in Porton Down describing how this facility conducts research of chemical weapons and deadly diseases. Despite that the UK has ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention, which obligates all member states to destroy their chemical weapons stockpiles, it was mentioned that DSTL does produce small amounts of chemical and biological agents for research and “to help develop effective medical countermeasures and to test systems”.

**15 August** – According to a press release published by the Metropolitan Police, traces of the “Novichok” nerve agent were found in the blood sample of a second police officer from Wiltshire police, who wished to remain anonymous. The police refused to clarify the officer’s role, adding only that he “displayed signs at the time” of exposure to a “very small amount” of the nerve agent, which, according to the report, makes him the second affected police officer (other than DS Nick Bailey) and the sixth “Novichok” exposure victim overall.

**On 26 November 2019, the Russian Ambassador to the UK Andrei Kelin** said in an interview: *“London has mounted accusations against us that we don’t understand as they are not supported by any evidentiary base. Therefore, we don’t accept them. [...] The Embassy [sent Notes Verbale] with requests to clarify what happened, but has received no reply. It is difficult to speculate on how our relations will develop before we move from this situation”.* The Ambassador added that Russia will continue to demand clarity as to the fate of Sergei and Yulia Skripal, Russian nationals.

**On 4 March 2021, Ambassador Kelin** reiterated Russia’s position in an interview: *“We don’t know what happened to Sergei and Yulia Skripal in Salisbury... We were not provided with any evidence or details of the incident. That’s why our view on this matter hasn’t changed. We do not believe in the allegations against Russia”.* He also said: *“We are facing a multi-staged operation, designed by a very talented dramatist.... We will hear the same background noise, which would include “Novichok”, chemical weapons, sanctions. These are no more than the separate acts of the same play”.*



**On 21 September 2021, British Police** announced that charges have been authorised against a third person named as ‘Sergey Fedotov’ in relation to the investigation into the Salisbury incident.

In an **interview** for the Russian TV in **March 2023, on the eve of the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Salisbury incident, Ambassador Kelin** stated: “*The events of 2018 have been transformed from a major single troubling issue in Russia-UK relations into the integral part of a comprehensive anti-Russian policy by the British authorities*”. He stressed that the hostile campaign led by London over the past year only served to confirm that Salisbury-related allegations made five years ago were supposed to be an initial, testing exercise for a large-scale smear operation aimed at presenting Russia as an enemy.

Ambassador Kelin also reiterated Russia’s concerns over the well-being of Sergei and Yulia Skripal and stressed the UK’s failure to provide any information about their situation and grant consular access which amounts to a violation by Great Britain of its international obligations.

## **V. Summary of the official position of the British Government**

The United Kingdom holds Russia responsible for the incident in Salisbury and considers it an unlawful use of force by the Russian state against the UK. According to the British officials, Sergei and Yulia Skripal were poisoned in Salisbury with a military-grade nerve agent of a type developed by Russia.

The main arguments used by the UK to support its case have been summarized by the **then Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson** in his article in the Sunday Times on 8 April 2018, as follows:

*“Our experts at Porton Down have identified the substance used against the Skripals as a “military grade” Novichok, a class of nerve agents developed by Russia.*

*In addition, the British government has information that within the last decade Russia has investigated ways of delivering nerve agents likely for assassination and as part of this programme has produced and stockpiled small quantities of Novichoks.*

*Moreover, Russia has an obvious motive for targeting Sergei Skripal. In the year that Skripal moved to Britain, President Putin made a televised threat that “traitors” would “kick the bucket” and “choke”.*

*The fate of Alexander Litvinenko, murdered in London in 2006, demonstrates the Kremlin’s willingness to kill someone in this country. The Russian Duma has actually passed a law that allows the assassination of “extremists” overseas.*

*Put the facts together and there is one conclusion: only the Russian state has the means, the motive and the record to carry out this crime”.*

The British interprets the materials included in the Report of the OPCW Technical Secretariat as a confirmation (evidential basis) of the results reached by the United Kingdom upon their preliminary estimations and the national investigation.

According to **Prime Minister Theresa May** (e.g. as per her statement in the House of Commons on 5 September 2018), two Russian nationals Alexander Petrov and Ruslan Boshirov – names

the police believe to be aliases – are treated as prime suspects for the attempted murder of Sergei and Yulia Skripal - and the subsequent poisoning of Dawn Sturgess and Charlie Rowley.

## **B. COMMENTARY**

### **VI. Inconsistencies in the British narrative**

#### ***1. The alleged Russian “capability, motive and track record”***

a) The British government claims having “**information that within the last decade Russia has investigated ways of delivering nerve agents** likely for assassination and as part of this programme has produced and stockpiled small quantities of Novichoks”.

Yet all production of chemical weapons in Russia stopped in 1992. The existing stockpiles, the largest in the world, were being destroyed for the following 25 years under strict control of the OPCW, of which the UK is an important member. **In September 2017, the OPCW certified the full destruction of Russia’s chemical weapons.** If the UK had information of Russia producing military-grade chemical agents in contravention of its obligations, one would expect the UK to raise the issue in 2017. They did not. It is also not clear what kind of information Britain possesses and how it has come to the conclusion regarding the purpose of the alleged production.

In this context, it is worth to recall that in his interviews, **Porton Down Chief Executive Gary Aitkenhead did not deny producing “Novichok”** at his facility.

b) The UK has pointed at an “**obvious motive**” for Russia targeting Sergei Skripal. They have quoted President Putin who allegedly made a “threat” that “traitors” would “kick the bucket” and “choke”.

In fact, in the cited 2010 TV interview **President (then Prime Minister) Putin actually directly denied the policy to assassinate traitors.** Consider the transcript:

*“Question: [...] According to memoirs, leaders of various countries signed orders to assassinate enemies of the state abroad. [...] Have you, as head of state, taken such decisions?”*

*Answer: [...] Russian special services do not use such methods. As regards traitors, they will kick the bucket themselves, I assure you. Take the recent case of treason [...] How will he live with it? How will he look into his children’s eyes? Whatever thirty pieces of silver they may have received, they will choke on them, I assure you. To keep hiding for the rest of their lives, not to be able to see their loved ones – you know, whoever chooses such fate will regret about it”.*

Further, Britain seems to imply that Mr Skripal was such a threat to Russia so as to be considered an obvious target. This is hard to reconcile with the fact that after having served a part of his sentence, Mr Skripal was pardoned and allowed to leave Russia for the UK where he has been living in peace for 8 years.

c) The UK refers to a “**track record** of state-sponsored assassinations”, citing notably the murder of Alexander Litvinenko in London in 2006. This allegedly “demonstrates the Kremlin’s willingness to kill someone in this country”.



In reality, **the murder of Alexander Litvinenko demonstrates Whitehall's willingness to classify key information** and put forward serious accusations unsupported by facts. The same script, but in a fast-forward mode, was played in 2018.

**d) British officials claim that the Russian Duma has passed a law that allows the assassination of "extremists" overseas. This is an outright lie. There is no such law in Russia.**

The closest Russia has is the 2006 law against terrorism that allows the President, with the agreement of the upper chamber of Parliament (a decision to be taken publicly), to send "formations of armed forces" to combat terrorists and their bases abroad. This is essentially the same procedure as the one prescribed by the Constitution for using troops beyond Russia's national territory. As one clearly sees, this has nothing to do with targeted killing. Invoking this law as a "confirmation" of Russia's policy reveals total lack of expertise, but also raises the question whether Mr Skripal has been engaged in any activities that the UK thinks Russia could conceivably consider as terrorist or extremist.

## ***2. Origin of the nerve agent and its characteristics***

- While Soviet scientists did work on new types of chemical poisons, **the word "Novichok" was introduced in the West** in mid-1990s to designate a series of new chemical agents developed there on the basis of information made available by Russian expat researchers. The British insistence to use the **Russian word "Novichok" is an attempt to artificially link the substance to Russia.**

Meanwhile, in a **2007** US-published handbook and a **2008** book by the defector chemist Vil Mirzayanov, **detailed information on several dozen "Novichok"-type substances was published.** Thereafter, this type of agents was described in numerous publications of US, Czech, Italian, Iranian, Indian researchers who, judging by their works, did actually synthesize them. Given the broad scientific literature, **it is safe to say that any modern chemical laboratory is capable of synthesizing "Novichok".**

- Contrary to official statements, Mark Urban claims in his book *"The Skripal Files: The life and Near Death of a Russian Spy"* that in the 1990s the **UK obtained samples** of certain types of chemical agents allegedly developed in the Soviet Union, including the one connected with the Salisbury incident, and the Porton Down secret laboratory got the chance to study it. This means that British chemical weapons experts could easily synthesize the agent in virtually any amounts.

- In an interview with Deutsche Welle published on 20 March 2018 Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson claimed that Porton Down had assured him of the Russian origin of the nerve agent. But on 3 April Chief Executive of the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory at **Porton Down** Gary Aitkenhead stated that his laboratory had identified the substance as a *"military-grade nerve agent but has not been able to identify its origin"*. On 4 April 2018 the Foreign Office deleted a tweet of 22 March 2018 about "the Russian origin" of this substance.

- According to Vil Mirzayanov and Vladimir Uglev, the "Novichok" is **very unstable and quickly degrades in contact with water.** Its potency is reduced dramatically if washed down quickly enough. This is consistent with the advice given by Public Health England to residents of Salisbury to wash their clothes in a washing machine using regular detergent and wipe

personal items with cleansing or baby wipes and dispose of the wipes in an ordinary domestic waste bin in order to avoid contamination. However, other British officials (Met Police, DEFRA, Wiltshire local authorities) have claimed that the agent could remain stable and potent for a very long time and therefore **aggressive caustic chemicals should be used for decontamination**.

- **Inconsistent approach to decontamination** has included complete sealing of a number of public locations visited by the Skripals (Sergei Skripal's house, "Zizzi" restaurant, The Bishop's Mill pub, The Maltings shopping centre) and thorough cleansing of their personal belongings including Sergei Skripal's car, with no known efforts to decontaminate the Salisbury District hospital.

- It has never been explained **how it was possible for the Skripals to lose consciousness simultaneously** several hours after coming into contact with the nerve agent, despite them being persons of different age, gender and body constitution.

- It has never been explained why **not a single person providing first aid and further medical assistance to the Skripals ever developed any signs or symptoms of nerve agent poisoning**, even if the nature of the poisoning was not known at least for two days.

### 3. Day of the incident

To check the credibility of the British narrative, it is useful to compare the timelines of known movements of the Skripals and the prime suspects on 3 and 4 March 2018:

|                | Sergei and Yulia Skripal   | Boshirov and Petrov  |
|----------------|--|--|
| <b>3 March</b> |  |  |
| 11:45          |  | Arrive at Waterloo station<br>Take a train to Salisbury  |
| 14:25          |  | Arrive at Salisbury  |
| 14:40          | Yulia Skripal arrives at Heathrow Airport on a flight from Moscow                    | <i>Spend 40 minutes in the Salisbury station café (as per their own account)</i>   |
| 16:15          |  | Leave Salisbury  |
| <b>4 March</b> |  |  |
| 08:05          |  | Leave hotel for Waterloo station. Take a train to Salisbury.   |
| 09:15          | Sergei's car is seen in the area of London Road, Churchill Way North and Wilton Road |  |
| 11:48          | Sergei's and Yulia's mobile phones are switched off for 4 hours                      | Arrive at Salisbury railway station  |
| 11:58          |  | Seen on CCTV at a Shell petrol station on Wilton Road (at 7 minutes' walk from Mr Skripal's house)   |
| 13:05          |  | Seen on CCTV on Fisherton Street in the city centre (at 25 minutes' walk from Mr Skripal's house and 6 minutes' walk from Salisbury Cathedral) |

|       |   |   |
|-------|---|---|
| 13:30 | Sergei's car is seen driven down Devizes Road, towards the town centre  | <i>Visited the Salisbury cathedral.<br/>Sat in a park.<br/>Drank coffee in a café.<br/>(as per their own account)</i> |
| 13:40 | Sergei and Yulia arrive in Sainsbury's upper level car park in the Maltings. At some time after this, they go to the Bishop's Mill Pub. |   |
| 14:20 | Dining at Zizzi restaurant  |   |
| 15:35 | They leave Zizzi  |   |
| 13:50 |   | Seen on CCTV at Salisbury station before taking a train to London.  |
| 16:15 | Emergency services arrive find Sergei and Yulia extremely ill on a bench  |   |
| 16:45 |   | Arrive in London before heading to Heathrow Airport and taking a flight to Moscow                                     |

As one can immediately see, the movements of both the victims and the suspects are known only to a limited extent. It is hard to explain the reluctance by the police to publish a clearer picture that would help alleviate the multiple doubts. Among the many omissions of information which is clearly available to the investigation, one may mention the following:

- **While some movements are published with extreme accuracy** ("arrived in Sainsbury's upper level car park"), **others are not**. Notably, **Mr Skripal's car movements in the morning** are only described as being "in the area of London Road, Churchill Way North and Wilton Road". This description potentially encompasses a significant area, stretching for over 4 miles from Salisbury's western to its northeastern outskirts, the latter point being at 5-miles' drive from Porton Down. Further, it is unclear in which direction the car was moving and how much time this journey took.

- The obscure nature of the Skripals' morning trip is accentuated by the alleged fact of their **mobile phones being switched off for 4 hours**. There has been no attempt either on the part of the investigation or the Skripals themselves to explain the unusual decision to switch off the phones, thus precluding anyone from knowing their exact itinerary. There has also been **no attempt to explain the fact of absence of more precise CCTV data on this trip**.

- It is thus not clear when the Skripals left home in the morning, what they did thereafter, and when/whether they returned home before heading to the city centre after 1 p.m. This leaves open the question of **whether the Skripals were at home at the time when chemical agent was allegedly put on their front door handle**, which could theoretically happen between 12:00 and 12:30.

- **It is inconceivable that there would have been no CCTV camera on Mr Skripal's house**. Recordings from that camera would constitute the best and most convincing piece of evidence. Why does the UK not publish those?

- There is equally **no information (either official or in the media) on any witnesses** who may have seen the Skripals or the main suspects at any particular point around the time when the poisoning could theoretically take place. This is particularly striking with regard to the two suspects, as two strangers in a calm residential area would have certainly been seen and noted by locals.
- **There has never been an attempt by the investigation to confirm or deny the account of the prime suspects** on their movements in Salisbury. Notably, they have asserted to have sat in the park, drunk coffee at a café and, most importantly, visited the cathedral. It is hard to see why checking this assertion and informing the public accordingly would constitute a problem. The same applies to the prime suspects' trip to Salisbury on 3 March.
- It was revealed in January 2019 that **the first person to attend to the Skripals after they lost consciousness was Colonel Alison McCourt, Chief Nursing Office of the Army**, and her daughter Abigail. There has been no attempt to explain why this extraordinary coincidence had been kept secret for the previous ten months.
- Another coincidence to which no satisfactory explanation has been given is the **presence, at Salisbury Hospital at the time of the Skripals' being admitted, of staff trained to deal with nerve agent poisonings**.

#### ***4. Other unexplained factual elements***

- The UK has repeatedly **denied an entry visa to Victoria Skripal**. The motives have never been convincingly explained. Moreover, while Sergei and Yulia remained unconscious, a number of legal decisions were taken by British authorities on their behalf, fully ignoring the fact that the Skripals have relatives in Russia who should have been consulted as the next of kin.
- There have been **conflicting reports on the fate of Sergei Skripal's pet animals**. No satisfactory explanation has ever been given to the fact that they were killed, reportedly at Porton Down, and that they had not been tested for nerve agent poisoning.
- The UK authorities have never announced how the prime suspects had received their visas and **what information on the purposes of their visit was indicated on their visa application forms**. This information would have been useful for ascertaining the credibility of the police's and the prime suspects' accounts of their trip.

### **VII. OPCW**

The British authorities have ignored the requirements of Paragraph 2, Article IX of the **Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC)**, which states that “*States Parties should, whenever possible, **first make every effort to clarify and resolve, through exchange of information and consultations among themselves, any matter which may cause doubt about compliance with this Convention, or which gives rise to concerns about a related matter which may be considered ambiguous***”.

Instead, the UK, with reference to Paragraph 38 e, Article VIII of the Chemical Weapons Convention, requested the OPCW Technical Secretariat to “independently verify” their own conclusions concerning the incident in Salisbury. However, this Paragraph concerns solely the provision of technical assistance to States Parties in the implementation of their regular

obligations under the Convention, first and foremost in terms of declaration and disposal of chemical weapons and control over other toxic chemicals. Cases of past application of this Paragraph confirm that “technical assistance” is understood as assistance to states lacking skilled personnel, equipment or technologies to achieve the CWC goals and objectives. Thus, Paragraph 38 e, Article VIII **does not vest the OPCW Technical Secretariat with a mandate to** conclude independent investigations, formulate its own conclusions, or **“independently verify” the results of an investigation concluded by any state.**

An OPCW team worked in Salisbury from 19 to 23 March. They collected blood samples from the Skripals and Det Sgt Bailey and environmental samples.

On 12 April 2018 the OPCW published conclusions on its investigation of the Salisbury incident. Although the OPCW did not publish the full version of the report, the UK claimed that the Organisation had confirmed the Skripals’ exposure to a “Novichok”-class agent.

Russian experts have identified **numerous inconsistencies in the OPCW report.** These include:

- The report contains no specific information on the level of acetylcholinesterase in the victims’ blood from the moment of their hospitalisation. This alone makes it impossible to convincingly conclude that they were exposed to a nerve agent on 4 March.
- The report does not contain enough information on the clinical picture, or medical treatment, especially as regards the prescribed doses of antidotes, such as oximes.
- The report does not explain the victims’ transition from a lengthy unconscious condition to active consciousness and apperception within a short period of time, which does not correspond to the usual effect done by anticholinesterase chemical agents.
- One of the report’s conclusions was that the toxic chemical in one of the victims’ blood was “of high purity”. This could not have been possible if samples were indeed taken more than two weeks after the poisoning.

This brief outline gives an idea of the problems identified by Russian experts. Their full conclusions cannot be made public at this stage due to the confidential nature of the OPCW report itself.

### **VIII. Media situation**

The UK has, on numerous occasions, accused Russia of “obfuscation and lies” in the context of the Salisbury incident. Yet it is the **UK’s own media policy with regard to this case that has been an example of secretiveness and lack of clarity.** Tabloid “leaks” from “informed sources within security services” has become the primary way for informing the public of isolated elements of the case, without it being possible to verify them. Numerous requests by the Russian authorities to UK counterparts to confirm or deny one factual element or another, were repeatedly met with a refusal “to discuss media coverage of an ongoing investigation”.

An early example of the results of such approach are the **numerous conflicting reports over the properties of the poison and how the Skripals came into contact with it.** Several versions have been explored by the media before the door handle version became the official one. These include:

1. The Skripals might have been poisoned with a synthetic opioid drug substance fentanyl. *Salisbury Journal*, 5 March 2018
2. The poison might have been mixed with drinks or food either in “Zizzi” restaurant or in “The Mill” pub. *The Sun*, 6 March 2018
3. The poison could have been sprayed by the attackers on the street. *The Sun*, 6 March 2018
4. The Skripals were poisoned by a hybrid version of thallium. *The Sun*, 6 March 2018
5. The Skripals were poisoned by sarin slipped by Kremlin-linked assassins into Sergei Skripal’s present in Moscow. *The Sun*, 9 March 2018
6. The Skripals could have been poisoned by a bouquet of fresh flowers which they laid on the grave of Sergei Skripal’s late wife. *Daily Mail*, 10 March 2018
7. The poison was smeared on Sergei Skripal’s car door handle. *Daily Mail*, 13 March 2018
8. The nerve agent used in Salisbury would have a very limited lifetime in the UK. This is presumably why the street in Salisbury was being hosed down as a precaution. *Daily Mail*, 13 March 2018
9. The nerve agent was concealed in an item of clothing, a gift or cosmetics in Yulia Skripal’s baggage. *Daily Telegraph*, 15 March 2018
10. The nerve agent was delivered by a drone. *Daily Star*, 18 March 2018
11. The nerve agent was introduced to Sergei Skripal’s car ventilation system. *Daily Mail*, 19 March 2018
12. The nerve agent was brought to Britain in a bag with buckwheat, bay leaves and spices, by Yulia Skripal’s acquaintance, who was coming to London by another flight. *The Sun*, 1 April 2018
13. The nerve agent used to poison the Skripals was specially designed to take about four hours to kill them so the assassins could flee Britain. *Daily Mail*, 7 April 2018
14. The assassin failed to understand the gel nerve agent needed dry conditions to be fully potent as it dissolves in water. *The Sun*, 14 April 2018

**Another example is the media information regarding actual or potential suspects. The respective reports include:**

1. British security agencies have red-flagged an individual who arrived at Heathrow on the Aeroflot flight 2570 at 14.32 on March 3 and returned to Moscow several hours later, raising questions as to the purpose of such short visit. *Daily Mail*, 3 April 2018
2. The Russian national suspected of planning the attack on the Skripals is living undercover in Britain and leads a six-strong hit squad known as “The Cleaners”. They use false identities from an EU state. *Sunday Mirror*, 7 April 2018



3. Yulia Skripal's fiancé Stepan Vikeev and his mother had a role in the Skripal poisoning. *Mail on Sunday*, 21 April 2018

4. Counter terror police have identified a Russian assassin believed to be connected to the Salisbury poisoning. He is a 54 year-old former FSB spy codenamed "Gordon" and is thought to use the cover name Mihails Savickis as well as two other aliases. Police fear he already left Britain and they may never have a chance to question him. *Sunday People*, 22 April 2018

5. Britain's intelligence services have compiled a list of key suspects involved in the attack in Salisbury. *Daily Mail*, 22 April 2018

6. "Johnny Mercer: Quickly on Salisbury, Sir Mark, do you know who the individuals are who poisoned the Skripals? Sir Mark Sedwill: Not yet." *Sir Mark Sedwill's oral evidence in the Commons Defence Committee*, 1 May 2018

7. A third Russian agent implicated in the Salisbury nerve agent attack was Sergei Fedotov. He aborted his planned exit from the UK and may still be in the country. *Daily Telegraph*, 6 February 2019.

It is also worth noting that, according to the *Sunday Times* of 8 April 2018, **the national security apparatus has "seized control" over the "media response"** to the incident. There have been numerous reports of **"D notices"** having been issued, prohibiting the media from reporting on aspects of the case. This was subsequently confirmed by several British journalists in off-the-record conversations with Embassy staff members.

### IX. The Skripals' current situation

The UK has repeatedly refused to disclose any information on Sergei and Yulia Skripals' current whereabouts, status and health condition. The reason cited is the need to ensure their security.

The UK insists that the Skripals are free and that, notably, they enjoy freedom of movement and communication. Yet **there are no known examples of Sergei's interaction with the outside world ever since 4 March 2018**, and such examples of **Yulia's contacts are limited** to the following:

- The phone call to Victoria Skripal on 5 April 2018, sounding as if Yulia had seized a moment to briefly speak to her cousin when not being watched or listened to. In that call, Yulia said that both she and her father were doing well, had no irreparable harm to their health, and also said to her cousin that "nobody will give you a visa, that's the situation here".

- The statement made by police on Yulia's behalf on the same day, seeking to confirm that Yulia had woken up a week before.

- The statement made by police on Yulia's behalf on 11 April 2018, curiously claiming that "no one speaks for me" and asking Victoria not to visit.

- The video statement of 23 May 2018, read from a prepared text which had been obviously pre-written in English by a native English speaker and thereafter translated into Russian.



Not only Victoria Skripal, but also now deceased Elena Skripal, Sergei's mother, repeatedly complained over the lack of contact with either Sergei or Yulia. Elena Skripal notably said this in the BBC Panorama documentary aired on 22 November 2018. On 19 February 2019, Russian media reported that Elena Skripal had applied to the police to have her son officially declared missing.

The UK's assertions of the Skripals' freedom of communication are thus not supported by facts.

## **X. Consular access**

According to the Subparagraphs a, b, c, Paragraph 1, Article 36 of the Vienna Convention, ***“consular officers shall be free to communicate with nationals of the sending State and to have access to them”***.

Article 36 of the bilateral Consular Convention between the USSR and the United Kingdom dated December 2, 1965 states that *“a consular officer shall be entitled within the consular district to communicate with, interview and advise a national of the sending State and may render him every assistance including, where necessary, arranging for aid and advice in legal matters”*.

In spite of this, **Russian Embassy's diplomats have not been granted consular access to Sergei and Yulia Skripal**. It's important to note that according to Article 30 of the 1965 Convention, *“the term ‘national’ shall mean any person whom the sending State recognises as its national”*. In this regard, the British citizenship of Sergei Skripal could not be considered as a ground to deny consular access.

A reference to an alleged refusal by the Russian citizens to avail themselves of diplomatic protection or consular assistance is unsustainable. A contact between a national and a consul is not only a right of the national, but also a right of the consul, i.e. the sending State. The underlying rationale is to exclude the possibility of a situation where a state abusing the rights of a foreigner would simply refer to that foreigner's unwillingness to see a consul, so as to allow for further abuse of rights without any consular control.

Furthermore, **the circumstances in which Yulia Skripal made her statement refusing consular visits cause doubt as to its voluntary nature**.

As the Russian Embassy has explained more than once, it is not seeking to offer the Skripals its help and support if they don't need or ask for it. Yet, given all the circumstances, it is important to hear their position on this matter from them personally and directly.

## **XI. Requests for legal assistance**

On 29 March and 17 April 2018 the Office of the Prosecutor General of **the Russian Federation requested legal assistance** from the Crown Prosecution Service under the 1959 European Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters within the framework of the investigation of the criminal case opened in Russia following the attempted murder of Sergei and Yulia Skripal. On 25 September 2018, the Embassy received a reply from the **Home Office informing the Russian side of a refusal to fulfil those requests**.

In refusing cooperation, the UK is referring to Article 2(b) of the 1959 European Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters. According to that article, assistance may be refused if the requested Party considers that execution of the request is likely to prejudice the sovereignty, security, *ordre public* or other essential interests of its country. The Home Office letter specified that the decision was taken at the highest political level.

In practice, this means that the UK is refusing to provide the Russian investigation with any information or evidence gathered by British Police when working on the Salisbury incident. This position has now been officially approved at the highest level and acquired a legal form.

Earlier, **the British authorities** had announced that they did not intend to pursue extradition of the “suspects” (“Boshirov and Petrov”) and made it clear that they **were not interested in submitting their own requests for legal assistance**, which could be provided by Russia by means of interrogation of certain persons, provision of access to documents, etc.

**Such position of the British authorities does not allow to bring the investigation to its logical end in either the Russian or the British jurisdiction.**

Thus, the British side has confirmed that from the very beginning the aims of its campaign around the poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal lay exclusively in the field of politics and propaganda. It has nothing to do with aspiration to establish the truth and bring those responsible to justice. The fact that the decision to refuse legal assistance has been made at the Office of the Prosecutor General amounts to another violation by the UK of its obligations under international law.

## **XII. Summary of the official position of the Russian Government**

**1. Russia has nothing to do with the incident that took place in Salisbury on 4 March.**

**2. The UK authorities have made quite serious accusations against Russia without presenting any hard evidence.** Subsequent events have shown that no evidence of Russian involvement exists. The only concrete fact that the UK is putting forward is the identification of the substance used as “Novichok”, **“a nerve agent developed by Russia”**, and the **mere presence in Salisbury of two Russian nationals** on the day of the incident.

**3. Neither Russia nor the Soviet Union have ever developed an agent named “Novichok”.** What later became known as “Novichok” was invented in the USSR but can now be produced by any modern chemical lab. OPCW did not identify the country of origin of the substance.

**4. The initial British “assessment” of Russia’s responsibility was based on unverifiable statements and artificial constructs.** The forcefulness with which the government is pressing these constructs only further illustrates the lack of facts.

**5. The UK has not complied with its obligations under consular conventions.** Yulia Skripal is undisputedly a Russian citizen who has the right to contact with consular authorities, and consular authorities have the right to contact with her. Given all the circumstances, allegations of her unwillingness to receive consular assistance cannot be taken for granted and need to be verified. Sergei Skripal appears to be UK citizen, yet he has never forfeited Russian citizenship and the related rights.

**6. The legal basis of British actions in the OPCW is doubtful.** Instead of using the normal OPCW procedures whereby the UK could have engaged Russia directly or through the OPCW Executive Council (under Article IX CWC), the UK has chosen to cooperate bilaterally with the OPCW Technical Secretariat under an arrangement the details of which are unknown. In the OPCW, there is no such procedure as “verification of analysis”.

**7. Analysis of all circumstances shows that UK authorities have embarked upon a policy of isolation of Mr and Ms Skripal from the public, concealment of important evidence and blocking an impartial and independent investigation.** The situation around the Skripals looks increasingly like a forcible detention or imprisonment, and the whole incident raises more and more questions as to potential involvement of British secret services. If British authorities are interested in assuring the public that this is not the case, they must urgently provide tangible evidence.

**8. The only evidence presented by the British authorities against Alexander Petrov and Ruslan Boshirov are the CCTV recordings.** But they **only confirm the fact of their visit to Salisbury** and do not prove any wrongdoings. There are no witness testimonies or further CCTV recordings confirming they indeed were in the vicinity of Sergei Skripal’s house.

**9. The UK authorities could have made an official request to question Alexander Petrov and Ruslan Boshirov** either in Russia or by a video conference call. Alternatively, they could have been questioned by the Russian law enforcement agencies in the framework of a joint investigation. However, **the UK government refused** to pursue these options.

**10. Overall, the UK’s refusal to pursue the available legal avenues precludes the case from running its natural course leading to prosecution of any individuals within either the British or the Russian jurisdiction.** This further testifies to a deliberate choice to keep the case within the political and media domain.

**ANNEX:**  
**Diplomatic correspondence I**  
**Russia's requests and questions to the UK, March – May 2018**

Requests

Note Verbale of 6 March 2018:

1. To issue an official comment on the incident. *Done.*
2. To provide information concerning the health condition of Mr and Ms Skripal and on the circumstances that led them to being hospitalized. *Partially fulfilled.*
3. To take note of the request my Mr Skripal's niece, Viktoria Skripal, to be informed of their health condition. *Ignored.*

Note Verbale of 13 March 2018:

4. To provide samples of the chemical substance allegedly used. *Denied.*
5. To provide full information on the investigation. *Ignored.*

Note Verbale of 14 March 2018:

6. To enable consular access to Mr and Ms Skripal. *Denied.*

Note Verbale of 16 March 2018:

7. To provide a full medical report on the health condition of Ms Skripal. *Ignored.*
8. To provide up-to-date visual materials confirming that Ms Skripal is safe and well treated. *Fulfilled by publishing Yulia Skripal's interview to Reuters on 23 May 2018.*

Note Verbale of 31 March 2018:

9. To conduct a joint investigation of the Salisbury incident and to hold urgent consultations on this matter. *Ignored.*

Note Verbale of 2 April 2018:

10. To provide all necessary assistance to Viktoria Skripal, including by issuing her a visa and allowing her access to her relatives. *Denied.*

Note Verbale of 3 April 2018:

11. To provide legal assistance to the Russian investigative authorities who have opened a case regarding attempted murder. *Denied*

Note Verbale of 5 April 2018:

12. To forward contact details of consular officials to Yulia Skripal. *Allegedly fulfilled.*

Letter of 6 April 2018:

13. To have a meeting between the Ambassador and the Foreign Secretary. *Meeting declined.*

Note Verbale of 9 April 2018:

14. To confirm or deny whether Mr and Ms Skripal are about to be resettled to a third country under new identities. *Ignored.*
15. To confirm or deny whether Mr Skripal's house will be demolished. *Ignored.*
16. To confirm or deny whether the alleged RAF-intercepted message from Syria formed part of information on the basis of which the decision was taken to expel Russian diplomats. *Ignored.*

Note Verbale of 10 April 2018:

17. To provide urgent proof that all actions in relation to Yulia Skripal are being taken in strict observance of her free will. *Ignored.*
18. To clarify conflicting reports as to whether OPCW experts directly took biomedical samples from Mr and Ms Skripal. *Partially answered by the FCO. OPCW confirms taking samples.*

Note Verbale of 11 April 2018:

19. To explain how exactly the UK has complied with its obligations under consular conventions. *Reply unsatisfactory.*
20. To confirm or deny whether Yulia Skripal has been moved to a "secure location", and to provide verifiable information on Mr and Ms Skripal's whereabouts, their health and wishes. *Reply unsatisfactory: "FCO does not comment on media coverage of on-going investigations".*

Note Verbale of 12 April 2018:

21. To clarify in a transparent and convincing way Mr and Ms Skripal's whereabouts and condition, with no possibility to verify the statement of the Metropolitan Police made on 11 April allegedly on behalf of Yulia Skripal. *Ignored.*

Note Verbale of 19 April 2018:

22. To provide an urgent medical examination of Yulia Skripal by Russian specialists. *Partially answered by the FCO, conditioning such examination on Yulia Skripal's agreement.*

Note Verbale of 20 April 2018:

23. To refrain from actions which directly undermine spirit and letter of the Chemical Weapons Convention and lead to deterioration of our bilateral relations. *The UK has confirmed taking note of the request.*

Note Verbale of 23 April 2018:

24. To grant legal assistance in criminal case on attempted murder of Yulia Skripal to the Prosecutor General's Office of the Russian Federation. *Denied.*

Note Verbale of 24 April 2018:

25. To refrain from exerting pressure against the Russian channel RT in accordance with UK's international obligations within the framework of the UN, OSCE and the Council of Europe to protect and promote freedom of the media and freedom of expression. *The UK has confirmed taking note of the request.*

Note Verbale of 24 May 2018:

26. To satisfy immediately all Embassy's legitimate requests, especially regarding consular access to Sergei and Yulia Skripal. *Ignored.*

Note Verbale of 31 May 2018:

27. To provide assistance in arranging a meeting between Embassy representatives and the medical staff involved in the treatment of Sergei and Yulia Skripal. *Ignored.*

Questions

Note Verbale of 22 March 2018:

1. What is Mr and Ms Skripal's exact diagnosis and condition? *Partially answered by Salisbury District Hospital.*
2. What treatment are they receiving? *Partially answered by Salisbury District Hospital.*
3. Is that treatment the same as that provided to Sgt Nick Bailey? *No information.*
4. Why has the condition of Mr Bailey and Ms Skripal improved, while Mr Skripal remains in a critical condition? *No information.*
5. Did Mr Bailey, Mr Skripal and Ms Skripal receive antidotes? *No official reply. According to Porton Down Chief Executive, no antidote exists against the substance used. Partially answered by Dr **Christine Blanshard**.*
6. Which antidotes exactly were administered? *See 5 above.*
7. What information and medical effects led to the decision to administer antidotes? How had the medical staff identify which antidotes to use? *See 5 above.*

8. Why are there no photos/videos confirming that the Skripals are alive and at hospital? *No information.*
9. Did the Skripals agree on Salisbury CCTV footage to be shown on TV? *No information.*
10. If not, who gave the agreement on their behalf? *No information.*
11. Is that person also entitled to authorize the publication of photos/videos? *No information.*
12. Is that person also entitled to authorize consular access? *No information.*
13. What protection against chemical exposure is used by the medical staff? *No information.*
14. If consular access is impeded by the risk of exposure, can the same protection be used by a consular officer? *No information.*

Note Verbale of 26 March 2018:

15. Could the hastiness in administering antidotes aggravate the condition of Mr Bailey, Mr and Ms Skripal? *See 5 above.*
16. Where, how and by whom were blood samples collected from Mr and Ms Skripal? *Reply received, with reference to OPCW report saying their experts took samples.*
17. How was it documented? *No information from the UK.*
18. Who can certify that the data is credible? *No information from the UK.*
19. Was the chain of custody up to all the OPCW requirements when evidence was collected? *No information from the UK. OPCW says chain of custody has been respected.*
20. Which methods (spectral analysis and others) were used by the British side to identify, within such a remarkably short period of time, the type of the substance used? *No information.*
21. Had the British side possess a standard sample against which to test the substance? *No information.*
22. Where had that sample come from? *No information.*
23. How can the delayed action of the nerve agent be explained, given that it is a fast-acting substance by nature? *No information.*
24. The victims were allegedly poisoned in a pizzeria (in a car, at the airport, at home, according to other accounts). So what really happened? How come they were found in some unidentified time on a bench in the street? *No official reply. Police says the victims came into contact with the poison through the front door.*
25. How do the hasty actions of the British side correlate with Scotland Yard's official statements that "the investigation is highly likely to take weeks or even months" to arrive at conclusions? *No information.*



Note Verbale of 28 March 2018:

26. Why have the authorities ignored the fact that Mr Skripal's niece has been enquiring of her uncle's and cousin's health? *No information.*

Note Verbale of 29 March 2018:

27. Is it true that Yulia Skripal has regained consciousness and can communicate, eat and drink? *Reply received.*

Note Verbale of 31 March 2018:

28. Why has Russia been denied consular access to the two Russian nationals, Sergei and Yulia Skripal, that have become crime victims in the British territory? *Reply unsatisfactory.*

29. What specific antidotes were administered to Mr and Ms Skripal, and in which form? How were those antidotes available for the medical staff on the site of the incident? *See 5 above.*

30. On what grounds has France been involved in technical cooperation with regard to the investigation of an incident in which Russian nationals had suffered? *No information from the UK.*

31. Has the United Kingdom informed the OPCW of France's involvement in the investigation? *No information from the UK.*

32. How is France relevant to the incident with two Russian nationals in the UK? *No information from the UK.*

33. What British procedural rules allow a foreign state to be involved in a domestic investigation? *No information from the UK.*

34. What evidence has been passed to France for studying and/or for a French investigation? *No information from the UK.*

35. Were French experts present when biological material was taken from Mr and Ms Skripal? *No information from the UK.*

36. Have French experts studied biological material taken from Mr and Ms Skripal, and at which laboratories? *No information from the UK.*

37. Does the UK possess the results of the French investigation? *No information from the UK.*

38. Have the results of the French investigation been passed to the OPCW Technical Secretariat? *No information from the UK.*

39. On the basis of which characteristics ("markers") has it been ascertained that the substance used in Salisbury "originated from Russia"? *No official reply. Porton Down Chief Executive confirmed that the experts did not make that conclusion.*

40. Does the UK possess reference samples of the military-grade poisonous substance that British representatives identify as “Novichok”? *No information.*

41. Has the substance identified by British representatives as “Novichok” or analogous substances been researched, developed or produced in the UK? *No information.*

Note Verbale of 5 April 2018:

42. Were the animals of Mr Skripal (two cats and two guinea pigs) subject to chemical poisoning? What treatment are they receiving? *According to public statements, the animals are dead. No information on chemical poisoning.*

Note Verbale of 6 April 2018:

43. Were the animals remains tested for a toxic substance, which would constitute useful evidence? *No information.*

44. Why the animals have been disposed of when they could have constituted an important piece of evidence? *No information.*

45. What immigration rules has Ms Viktoria Skripal violated? *No information.*

46. What options are available to her should she wish to go ahead with her visit? *Reply received: Viktoria Skripal may submit a new visa application.*

Note Verbale of 10 April 2018:

47. What symptoms did Mr and Ms Skripal experience on admission to hospital and what treatment they received? *No reply from the FCO. Partially answered by Salisbury District Hospital.*

Note Verbale of 16 April 2018:

48. Does the recently created Twitter account @SkripalYulia belong to Ms Yulia Skripal? If it does, is it the Metropolitan police or Ms Skripal herself who manages it? *No information.*

49. Have UK secret services monitored private correspondence of Ms Yulia Skripal, as suggested in Sir Mark Sedwill’s letter to NATO? *No information.*

Note Verbale of 20 April 2018:

50. Have Mr Vladimir Ulev, Mr Hamish de Bretton-Gordon or any other private individuals been provided with any data related to the investigation? *Reply unsatisfactory: the FCO will not be commenting on media coverage of an ongoing investigation.*

Note Verbale of 30 May 2018:

51. What exact treatment did Sergei and Yulia Skripal receive at the hospital? *No reply from the FCO. Partially answered by Salisbury District Hospital.*

52. What antidotes were administered, if any? *No reply from the FCO. Partially answered by Salisbury District Hospital.*

53. What “combinations of drugs” were used? *No reply from the FCO. Partially answered by Salisbury District Hospital.*

54. What assistance was provided by “international experts”, including those from the Porton Down chemical weapons laboratory? *No reply.*

55. What “new approaches to well-known treatments” were tried? How exactly did they contribute to the speed of the patients’ recovery that the medical staff could not entirely explain? *No reply.*

56. Why has there not been any clear explanation by the British side as to why decontamination of the hospital did not take place, although the sites visited by Sergei and Yulia Skripal on 4 March are undergoing a thorough chemical clean-up? *No reply.*

57. Why did the medical staff assume the role of legal representatives of Sergei and Yulia Skripal and insisted that international inspectors obtain a court order before they would be allowed to take blood samples from them, while the British side was well aware that they had relatives in Russia? *No reply.*

### **Diplomatic correspondence II**

#### **Follow up since May 2018**

Following initial events in early 2018 the Embassy of Russia in London continued its efforts to obtain relevant information on the circumstances of the Salisbury incident and situation of Sergei and Yulia Skripal, as well as to secure consular access to the two Russian nationals in order to ascertain their well-being and protect their legitimate rights.

Diplomatic notes and letters have been sent repeatedly to the FCO/FCDO, British officials and MPs since May 2018. A total of 65 Notes Verbale and 11 official letters have been issued by the Embassy. Most recently Notes Verbale on the subject were sent on 2 September 2022, 16 December 2022 and 3 March 2023. All of them contained, among other requests, questions about the well-being of Sergei and Yulia Skripal. No response has been received from the British authorities.