



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1306 Vienna, 18 March 2021

EU Statement on “Russia’s Ongoing Aggression against Ukraine and Illegal Occupation of Crimea”

Madam Chair, the conflict in eastern Ukraine, caused by acts of aggression by the Russian Federation and the illegal annexation of the Crimean peninsula, remain a severe challenge to the European security. This is why the European Union once again has extended the sanctions targeting those responsible for undermining or threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine.

The resolution of this conflict must be kept at the top of the OSCE agenda and we therefore appreciated the briefings by Ambassadors Heidi Grau and Halit Çevik organised by the Swedish Chairpersonship last week. We agree with the Ambassadors that the ceasefire is essential for the civilians living along the contact line, and we also share their concern about the recent spikes of hostilities. Ceasefire violations, weapons in violation of withdrawal lines prolongation of old as well as newly constructed trenches at the contact line, live-fire training in the security zones and increased frequency of damage to civilian infrastructure are all contributing to an overall volatile security situation.

We share the concerns expressed by Ambassadors Çevik and Grau about the stalemate within the Trilateral Contact Group, which consists of Ukraine and Russia with the OSCE as mediator. We regret to hear from Ambassador Grau about the lack of political will that she has been experiencing for months in the TCG. We also urge the sides to step up their efforts in implementing the conclusions from the Normandy Summit in Paris in December 2019 as well as the initial agreement in the TCG on two

new disengagement areas and 19 demining zones. In this context, we call on Russia to act constructively within these discussions.

We share Ambassador Çevik's concern that the fact that only few civilians are allowed to cross the contact line lead to a long separation of families and communities, which could obstruct the reintegration of the non-government controlled areas into Ukraine. We call on Russia to use its considerable influence over the armed formations it backs in order to operationalise the Zolote and Shchastia entry-exit checkpoints (EECPs), and to open all currently closed EECPs, in order to improve the humanitarian situation at the contact line and to allow for progress in the rehabilitation of economic ties.

We strongly condemn actions which jeopardise the security of SMM monitors or their assets, including signal interference with the mission's UAV's. We regret that on 14 March, the SMM lost a mid-range UAV due to jamming and on 15 March the SMM was again denied by the Russia-backed armed formations to cross the checkpoint near Olenivka. The SMM must have safe, secure, unconditional and unimpeded access to the entire territory of Ukraine in line with its mandate. This includes the illegally annexed Crimean peninsula and the area along the Ukraine-Russia state border, to which the SMM is systematically denied access by Russia-backed armed formations.

We also reaffirm our full support and commitment to the core tasks and overall objectives of the SMM, as reflected in its mandate and in the budget proposal. We therefore call on all participating States to work in good faith towards a timely approval of the SMM budget and the extension of the Mission mandate.

We reiterate our condemnation of Russia's illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol and the ongoing human rights violations in the peninsula. Seven years ago, the Russian Federation attempted to give its military actions a veneer of legitimacy with an illegal referendum. This so-called "referendum" was a blatant violation of the Ukrainian constitution. Ukrainian media was shut down so that pro-Russian propaganda could dominate. The vote was prepared in less than 20 days in a heavily militarised environment of intimidation with no credible election observers present. It was not recognised as legitimate by the

international community and on 27 March 2014, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 68/262 on the “Territorial Integrity of Ukraine”.

The EU remains firm in its call on all sides to swiftly and fully implement the Minsk agreements and honour their commitments in full in order to achieve a sustainable political solution to the conflict in line with the OSCE principles and commitments. We call on Russia to fully assume its responsibility in this regard and to use its considerable influence over the armed formations it backs to meet the Minsk commitments in full. Respect for these principles and commitments must be restored. We again call on Russia to immediately stop fuelling the conflict by providing financial and military support to the armed formations, and we remain deeply concerned about the presence of Russian military equipment and personnel in areas held by Russia-backed armed formations. The duration of the European Union’s sanctions against Russia is linked to the complete implementation of the Minsk agreements.

The EU recalls its unwavering support to the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders, and calls upon Russia to do likewise. We urge Russia to uphold these fundamental principles that it has itself invoked many times and to contribute, by acts and public pronouncements, to stabilising the situation and reversing moves that contravene these principles. We strongly condemn the clear violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity by acts of aggression by the Russian armed forces since February 2014 and the illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol to the Russian Federation, which we will not recognise. The European Union will remain committed to fully implement its non-recognition policy, including through restrictive measures.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

* Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.