



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation N°958
Vienna, 21 October 2020**

EU Statement on the security situation in and around Ukraine

Madame Chair, the European Union and its Member States welcome another two weeks, since our last meeting, of relative calm along the line of contact. However, we are concerned about the fact that violations of the ceasefire are still observed, as well as the presence of weapons in violation of withdrawal lines in non-government controlled areas. We urge the sides to keep their commitments to the ceasefire and to refrain from actions that could put it at risk. We wish to underline the crucial importance of a functioning coordination mechanism for responding to ceasefire violations and preventing possible future escalations and in this context we call on Russia to return to the Joint Centre for Control and Coordination.

Last week brought more reports of civilian casualties caused by explosive objects and mines, including an 11-year-old boy. The SMM corroborated 35 civilian casualties, including 8 fatalities, victims of mines and other explosive devices so far this year. These tragic incidents are a constant reminder of the vulnerability of the local population and underline the urgency of mine action.

Regretfully, progress on mine action, as well as new disengagement areas, although provisionally agreed, continues to be obstructed by Russia due to other unrelated political considerations in the Trilateral Contact Group. This unacceptable behavior was confirmed by Ambassadors Heidi Grau and Chief Monitor Cevik in the Permanent Council on 8 October. We express our appreciation for the efforts of Ambassador Grau to ensure the proper conduct and confidentiality of the TCG negotiations.

The political will to move forward is now crucial and urgent, including on the humanitarian issues, before the onset of the winter. In this regard, we commend Ukraine for its constructive approach and call on Russia to reciprocate.

The EU deplores any attempts to harass, intimidate or impede the work of SMM personnel and condemns the continued threats and restrictions to the SMM, which occur predominantly in non-governmental-controlled areas. This practice hampers the SMM from fulfilling its mandate. The SMM must have safe, secure, unconditional and unimpeded access to the entire territory of Ukraine, including the areas along the Ukrainian-Russian State border, in accordance with its mandate and must not be forced to operate de facto as three separate entities. We urge Russia to use its considerable and undeniable influence over the armed formations it backs to ensure that all undue restrictions on the SMM are removed. We once again deplore targeting of SMM assets, including SMM UAVs, by means of signal interference and small arms fire. Those responsible for any wilful damage, destruction or loss of SMM UAVs and other assets should be held accountable, both politically and financially.

The relevance of technical assets was again demonstrated last week, when an SMM long-range UAV spotted on 16 October convoys of military trucks unloading cargo and crossing the state border between Ukraine and Russia on an unpaved road, in a non-government-controlled area of the Donetsk region near Manych where there are no border crossing facilities. This shows again how invaluable the SMM remains as a source of information on what is really happening on the ground. We urge Russia to ensure that the relevant parts of the Ukrainian-Russian border are properly controlled on the Russian side, in order to support implementing the Minsk agreements.

Madame Chair, the European Union and its Member States continue to follow closely the worrying developments on the Crimean peninsula which is part of Ukraine. We do not recognise the illegal annexation of the Crimean peninsula by Russia, which is a clear violation of international law. Therefore, we strongly condemn another recently announced conscription of residents of the peninsula to the Russian Federation Armed Forces. This is a violation of international humanitarian law, which also Russia is bound by.

In conclusion, we remain firm in our 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 OSCE principles and commitments. Respect for these principles and commitments must be restored. We underline Russia's responsibility in this regard and once again call on Russia to use its considerable influence over the armed formations it backs to meet these commitments in full. We reiterate our deep concern about the presence of military equipment and personnel from Russia in the conflict zone. We call on Russia to immediately stop providing financial and military support to the armed formations. The ceasefire must be respected. All Minsk-regulated weapons must be withdrawn. All foreign armed formations, military equipment and mercenaries must be removed from Ukraine. Re-establishing full Ukrainian control over its state border is essential.

We recall our unwavering support to the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders and call upon Russia to do likewise. We urge Russia to recognise 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. We continue to call on Russia to ensure unhindered and free passage to and from the Sea of Azov in accordance with international law. We express our deep concern about the ongoing large-scale militarisation of the Crimean peninsula by Russia, which continues to impact the security situation in the Black Sea region and beyond.

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, GEORGIA, ANDORRA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

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