



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation N°978 Vienna, 2 June 2021

EU Statement on the security situation in and around Ukraine

Mr. Chair, it has now been about two months since the Russian Federation started its unusual military build-up along its border with Ukraine and in the illegally annexed Crimean peninsula. We regret that Russia has chosen not to engage meaningfully under the Vienna Document Risk Reduction Mechanism invoked by Ukraine. The announcement of the withdrawal of some Russian troops was a positive signal. However, in order to dispel tensions, we urge Russia to provide more transparency on the process of withdrawal and on the remaining forces and equipment. Faithful implementation of the OSCE principles and commitments – in letter and spirit - is of utmost importance.

These escalatory actions are only one part of recent worrying developments. We also witness a continuously volatile security situation in eastern Ukraine. Moreover, last week, the standard extension of the mandate of the Border Observer Mission in Gukovo and Donetsk was impeded. This is accompanied by attempts to install a distorted narrative, according to which, Russia is a “mediator” of an “internal Ukrainian conflict”. We reject this misleading narrative.

We were deeply concerned by Russia’s insistence to shorten the mandate of the Border Observer Mission to two months. This calls into question the host country’s support for the Mission and sends a negative political signal. It also contradicts the letter and spirit of the Minsk agreements. We recall that the Minsk Protocol calls for permanent

monitoring of the border and verification by the OSCE and that the Minsk Package of Measures includes a commitment to reinstate full Ukrainian control over its entire international border. Effective and comprehensive monitoring of this border is an integral part of a sustainable political solution to the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

At the same time, in non-government-controlled areas adjacent to the Ukraine –Russia state border, the SMM continues to face serious and unacceptable restrictions to its freedom of movement which affect the Mission’s ability to fulfil its mandate. In addition, over recent weeks, SMM’s UAVs have consistently been subjected to jamming and interference, causing damage or losses of these valuable assets and leading to occasional suspensions of overflights by long range UAVs. UAVs are an essential part of SMM operations. They provide the pS with information about activities on the ground, which include evidence of Russia’s support to the armed formations, such as images of convoys crossing the uncontrolled segment of the border, very often at night and in areas with no border crossing infrastructure, or reports on the presence of sophisticated Russian military equipment. Such information is crucial for our discussions in this Forum.

Ceasefire violations in the conflict zone continue unabated. This trend is of great concern as it threatens the ceasefire in place since July 2020, which up to a few months ago was still largely respected. Moreover, the human toll of this conflict keeps rising, with five civilian casualties including a fatality reported only last week. We recall that ensuring lasting security on the ground is critical for further steps in the settlement of this conflict.

The SMM remains our source of reliable information on the situation on the ground. We highly value its regular and thematic reports. Today we wish to thank the SMM for its latest thematic report on the impact of mines and unexploded ordnance on the civilian population in the conflict area covering the period from November 2019 until March 2021. The report shows the harmful effects of mines and other explosive objects on civilians on both sides of the line of contact. In the reporting period the SMM confirmed the total of 76 civilian casualties, including 20 fatalities, due to mines and

explosives. These statistics underlines the urgency for de-mining. It is unacceptable that within the TCG the final agreement on the 19-demining zones is still blocked despite readiness of Ukraine to move ahead with the process.

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 for 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 Russia's actions to block access to parts of the Black Sea, including near illegally-annexed Crimea and the Kerch Strait, and 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 and ANDORRA align themselves with this statement.

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