



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation N°970 Vienna, 17 March 2021

EU Statement on the security situation in and around Ukraine

Madam Chair, it has been three weeks since our last discussion at this Forum about the conflict in eastern Ukraine and the illegal annexation of Crimea. Unfortunately, the situation has not improved since then.

Regrettably, the prospects of overcoming the stalemate in the implementation of the Minsk agreements are not too bright. This is due to the lack of a key important ingredient: political will. The cost of this immovability is high. The new disengagement areas, new de-mining zones and new EECs have long been on the table. The agreement on these issues would improve the lives of civilians in the conflict zone. Ukraine has demonstrated its willingness to move ahead on these issues. We recall Russia's responsibility as a signatory of the Minsk agreements and urge Russia to implement the provisions that it has committed itself to.

We commend the Swedish OSCE Chairpersonship for keeping this conflict at the top of the OSCE agenda and are grateful for Ambassadors' Heidi Grau and Halit Çevik briefings last week. Such interactions are much appreciated. We fully share their assessment on the importance of maintaining the current ceasefire. We thus share their concerns about the weakening adherence to the ceasefire and the upward trend in ceasefire violations. This is highly troubling. It leads, inter alia, to more human suffering, lost lives, injuries and destroyed civilian infrastructure. Last week we saw

again reports about fatalities among the Ukrainian military personnel due to sniper fire, which is a premeditated breach of ceasefire with the intention to wound or to kill.

The SMM is our most valuable asset on the ground. We commend the brave women and men of the SMM for carrying out their tasks in extremely challenging conditions, exacerbated by the ongoing pandemic. Hence, it is crucial that the pS extend without undue delay the mandate of the Mission and equip it with the new budget. The EU Member States stand united in their support to the Mission and for the proposed budget.

The SMM needs to have full freedom of movement within the entire territory of Ukraine, including Crimea and along the whole Ukraine-Russia state border. All impediments to the SMM's work, the overwhelming majority of which occur in the non-government controlled areas, are unacceptable. In recent weeks, new cases of harassment of Mission's staff occurred, e.g. on 18 February near Vosnesenivka, on 23 February near Novoazovsk, on 1 March and two days ago near Olenivka, all in non-government controlled areas. We call on Russia to exercise its considerable and undeniable influence over the armed formations it backs to see that these impediments finally stop.

The increased incidents involving the Mission's UAVs are another troubling development. According to last week's report the Mission recorded 16 cases of signal interference. On 10 March, a mini-UAV was targeted by small arms fire near non-government controlled Sentianivka in Luhansk region. We are concerned about the loss of a long-range UAV on 7 March and welcome the intention of the Mission to present the results of its investigations into this incident as soon as possible. Those responsible for any wilful damage, destruction or loss of SMM UAVs should be held accountable, both politically and financially.

The SMM's UAVs have, on many occasions, proved their value for money. They provide the pS with irrefutable evidence of Russia's support to the armed formations, be it with pictures of convoys crossing the uncontrolled segment of the Ukrainian-Russian State border or documenting the presence of the sophisticated Russian

military equipment as was the case on 15 February when a 51U6 Kasta-21 target acquisition radar was spotted near non-government controlled Buhavka. We note with regret that the Russian Federation has not provided any credible explanation about these incidents despite being urged on the latter at the last two meetings of the Permanent Council.

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.

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