



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation N°976 Vienna, 19 May 2021

EU Statement on the security situation in and around Ukraine

Mr. Chair, it is essential that all pS uphold the OSCE principles and commitments to which they have signed up to, including those on transparency about military forces and activities. The European Union and its Member States wish to recall their deep concern about last month's escalatory actions by the Russian Federation. We welcome reports that the return of some Russian troops to their "normal peacetime locations", as announced by the Russian Defence Minister, appears to have taken place. We will closely monitor the situation as the amount of remaining troops and heavy equipment in close proximity to the border with Ukraine and in the illegally-annexed Crimea continues to be unusually high. In this context, we reiterate our call on the Russian Federation to follow up on the recommendations put forward at the joint PC-FSC meeting of 14 April and to brief the pS about those exercises which, according to the Chief of the Russian General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov, involved about 300,000 military personnel.

Against this backdrop, the security situation at the contact line in eastern Ukraine also remains worrying. Last week the SMM reported another two-fold increase in ceasefire violations, following a two-week period of a downward trend. The Mission corroborated three civilian casualties all due to mines, unexploded ordnance and other explosive objects. Moreover, since the beginning of the year, the SMM has confirmed damage

to 19 private properties and public civilian sites on both sides of the contact line, including to houses, apartments, sheds, operational schools, a water station and an operational hospital. We are deeply concerned about the fragility of the ceasefire. We call on the sides to redouble their efforts to maintain the ceasefire which remains critical for further steps in the settlement of this conflict. We commend Ukraine for its restraint in responding to military provocations by the Russia-backed armed formations, despite the regretful and unacceptable death toll among its military personnel.

The SMM must have safe, secure, unconditional and unimpeded access to the entire territory of Ukraine, with a view to the implementation of its mandate to its full extent. This includes the illegally-annexed Crimea and the city of Sevastopol and along the whole Ukraine-Russia state border. 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 the commitment to reinstate full Ukrainian control over its entire international border. We believe that effective and comprehensive monitoring of the Russia-Ukraine state border is necessary to improve the security situation and to help find a sustainable political solution to the conflict.

We deplore any attempts to harass, intimidate or obstruct the work of the SMM and its monitors and condemn the continued restrictions, which occur overwhelmingly in non-government-controlled areas. We recall our position that any impediments to the SMM's work, including attempts to damage or destroy the SMM's assets, are unacceptable. We deplore another incident two days ago when a long-range UAV was again damaged due to signal interference. Those responsible for any wilful damage, destruction or loss of SMM UAVs and other assets must be held accountable, both politically and financially.

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 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 and 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.