



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1261 Vienna, 5 March 2020

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

Mr Chairperson, it has now been almost three months since the Normandy Summit was held in Paris. In this Summit, there was an agreement on steps forward which, when implemented, would have a positive humanitarian effect on the civilian population along the contact line, but may also bring new impetus towards a sustainable political solution of the conflict in full respect of the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence of Ukraine.

At the end of last year, there was some progress with the three disengagement areas and the long-awaited repair of the bridge in Stanytsia Luhanska. It is therefore with a heavy heart that we once again note that the security situation along the line of contact has been highly volatile during recent weeks, with an exceptional spike in ceasefire violations in the Luhansk region on 18 February, repeated violations in the disengagement area of Petrivske, and the reported use of Minsk-prohibited weapons which brought more casualties among the civilian population and the Ukrainian military personnel. These recent developments show how fragile the situation in eastern Ukraine is and how easily positive steps can be reversed.

In this context, the EU again calls on the sides to swiftly and fully implement the Minsk agreements and honour their commitments in full. We commend the Ukrainian leadership for the constructive approach taken and the political will to negotiate an end to the conflict and call on Russia to act likewise. We also call on Russia to fully assume its responsibility and to use its considerable influence over the armed formations it backs to meet the Minsk commitments in full.

We regret that it has not yet been possible to agree on the new disengagement areas in line with the Normandy commitments. They are important confidence-building measures, albeit not a replacement for the full and comprehensive ceasefire. We are concerned by SMM reports on ceasefire violations inside and in close vicinity to the existing disengagement areas and the continued presence of members of armed formations wearing JCCC armbands without being entitled to, which constitutes a violation of the TCG agreement on disengagement. In this context, we reiterate our call on Russia to return to the Joint Centre for Control and Coordination. We regret that Russia did not take part in the recent Normandy Four military expert meeting in order to discuss the issue.

We note that mine action was again discussed in the latest meeting of the Trilateral Contact Group. As eastern Ukraine remains one of the places most severely affected by mines and unexploded ordnance in the world, demining needs special attention. With over 1,400 mines on both sides of the line of contact, mines are the main cause of casualties among civilians. Eight out of fourteen civilian victims have been injured by mines this year. As weather conditions are improving, we call for increased demining activity to make safe roads and places close to the entry-exit checkpoints which are used by civilians and by the SMM.

The SMM is our key source of information about what is happening on the ground. We strongly condemn actions which jeopardise the security of SMM monitors or their assets, including signal interference of the mission's UAV's. The SMM must have safe, secure, unconditional and unimpeded access to the entire territory of Ukraine in order to fully implement its mandate. This includes access to the illegally annexed Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol and the area along the Ukraine-Russia state border, to which the SMM is systematically denied access by Russia-backed armed formations.

We once again reaffirm our strong support to the SMM and reiterate our commitment to back the Mission in every possible way, including financially and by providing qualified staff and appropriate equipment. We call on all participating States to make efforts to close the funding gap and engage in an appropriate financing of the Mission. We commend those participating States that have already made substantial contributions, also on voluntary basis.

We reiterate our position on the Russian presidential decree of April 2019 to grant citizenship to inhabitants of Donbass. It is an attack on the sovereignty of Ukraine and runs counter to the spirit of the Minsk agreements. The European Union issued a

guidance on territorial competence and non-recognition of such passports and calls on other participating States not to recognize them either.

We continue to call on Russia to ensure unhindered and free passage to and from the Sea of Azov in accordance with international law.

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 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 economic 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*, and 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.