



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Permanent Council No. 1284 Vienna, 8 October 2020

#### **EU Statement in response to the Update by the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson in Office in Ukraine and in the Trilateral Contact Group, Ambassador Heidi Grau, and to the Report by the Chief Monitor of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, Ambassador Yaşar Halit Çevik**

Mr. Chairperson, the European Union warmly welcomes Ambassador Heidi Grau and Ambassador Yaşar Halit Çevik back to the Permanent Council and expresses its full support and appreciation for your efforts towards achieving sustainable peace in Ukraine. We appreciate your presence today at the Permanent Council as another confirmation of your determination to engage directly with the participating States.

The EU commends the Trilateral Contact Group for the efforts that led to the recommitment of the sides to the ceasefire, including the adoption of the additional measures to strengthen the ceasefire that took effect on 27 July 2020. Since then, we have witnessed an improvement of the security situation in the conflict area, including a significant drop in the number of ceasefire violations, a reduction in casualties and in damage to civilian properties and infrastructure. This is a significant progress compared to the pre-commitment period. This positive trend needs to be reinforced. We call on the sides to fully comply with already agreed measures. In this context, we also underline the importance of a functioning coordination mechanism for responding to ceasefire violations and reiterate our call on Russia to return to the JCCC.

We note, however, with concern the reported increase in the number of individuals inside the Zolote and Petrivske disengagement areas during evening and night hours, as well as reports on the ongoing fortification works which have substantially narrowed the distance between forward positions. Such actions run counter to the agreed measures and put the recently achieved progress at risk.

The lasting ceasefire has a beneficial impact on the living conditions of civilians. Nevertheless, in times of pandemic and in light of the upcoming winter season more efforts are needed to protect and assist civilians, who are paying the price of the conflict. In this regard, the demining efforts remain of utmost importance. Moreover, the situation at the checkpoints should also be addressed before the onset of winter. A very limited number of active checkpoints, burdensome administrative procedures, additional requirements imposed due to the pandemic as well as the lack of proper facilities add to the hardship of civilians, particularly of the most vulnerable categories. We renew our call on the sides to ease human suffering by a sustained de-mining effort and by simplifying the crossing of the contact line.

The EU fully supports efforts within the Normandy Format and the TCG aimed at reaching a political solution to the conflict in full respect of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. Ambassador Grau, we value your perseverance and dedication in steering the TCG in these challenging times. The unprecedented improvement of the security situation has created a unique opportunity for further progress. However, as you rightly stated, the TCG is still facing procedural objections and political stalemate. We regret that the Resolution of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine on the local elections in 2020 is used by Russia as a pretext to block much needed progress on many tracks within the TCG. Such clearly political considerations should not be allowed to hamper other issues, including agreement on new disengagements areas, an updated demining action plan or an exchange of detainees. We recall that it is essential that the ICRC be finally granted access to the detainees in the non-government controlled area. We also underline the need for confidentiality in political negotiations as sensitive as those within the TCG. The threats by the Russian side to publish recordings are unacceptable. We commend Ukraine for its constructive approach and call on Russia to reciprocate.

Ambassador Çevik, the EU highly appreciates the impartial and comprehensive reports provided by the SMM and attaches great importance to securing proper conditions for SMM operations. Regrettably, as stated in your last report, despite partial relaxation, restrictions on the freedom of movement imposed by the Russian-backed armed formations continue to hamper the Mission's activities. It is deplorable that the SMM cannot conduct its monitoring operations seamlessly across the contact line and is de facto obliged to act 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 recall that the SMM should have, in accordance with its mandate, unhindered access to the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders, including Crimea. In this regard, we regret that the monitors continue to face restrictions in areas adjacent to the segment of the Ukraine Russia state border outside the control of the Ukrainian government. We remain deeply concerned about the military activities in these areas and across the border, as observed by the SMM. We fully support the plans to open additional Forward Patrol Bases in order to strengthen the SMM's footprint in the area and call for providing necessary security guarantees to this effect.

We commend the SMM for its valuable reports on the situation of the civilian population and the damage of critical infrastructure. We would also thank SMM for its efforts on the ground to facilitate dialogue between the sides according to its mandate in order to agree on repair works, demining activities or the current firefighting operations in Luhansk region.

We are pleased to see an increased use by the Mission of technical means to ensure its operational sustainability. However, we note with concern that the number of the SMM patrols had to be significantly reduced, when compared with the same period last year, and the SMM UAV's and cameras continue to be targeted on a near daily basis through signal interference and by small-arms fire. It is particularly worrisome that the SMM cameras destroyed during the previous reporting period still remain non-operational, severely limiting the Mission's monitoring capabilities. In this regard, we would appreciate your update on the

outcomes of the internal investigation into these unacceptable incidents. We recall that those responsible for any wilful damage, destruction or loss of SMM UAVs and other assets should be held accountable, both politically and financially.

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 the 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 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, 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.