



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1285 Vienna, 15 October 2020

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

Mr. Chairman, the EU’s support to Ukraine was clearly demonstrated during the 22nd EU-Ukraine Summit on 6 October. The Summit underscored the value of our partnership, providing an opportunity to reaffirm our continued commitment to strengthening the political association and economic integration of Ukraine with the EU, as well as the EU’s unwavering support to Ukraine’s independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders. Against this background, three new programs have been launched with the focus on: increasing Ukraine’s resilience to conflicts and hybrid threats, including disinformation; empowerment of civil society, and support for a green economy.

The EU welcomes another week of relative calm along the line of contact. The SMM reports confirm that the comprehensive and unlimited ceasefire is largely holding and the number of violations remains at an unprecedentedly low level. However, we are concerned about the observed presence of weapons in violation of withdrawal lines in non-government controlled areas. In this context, we urge the sides to keep their commitments to the ceasefire and to refrain from actions that could put it at risk. Moreover, the additional measures are not fully respected by the sides and a proper coordination mechanism to adequately respond to possible escalations is still missing. We therefore reiterate our call on Russia to return to the Joint Centre for Control and Coordination.

We fully support the continued international diplomatic efforts within the Normandy format and the Trilateral Contact Group aimed at reaching a political solution to the conflict in eastern Ukraine. Regrettably, as we heard at the last Permanent Council, the favourable conditions derived from the ceasefire are currently not reflected in the TCG discussions. We reiterate that the favourable security situation must now be used to overcome the stalemate in these discussions. It is unacceptable that political considerations related to the local elections and obstruction by the Russian side continue to hamper the progress on other important issues, including agreement on new disengagements areas, an updated demining action plan or an exchange of detainees. We regret that the ICRC has still not been granted access to detainees in the non-government controlled area. We condemn any attempts to disrupt the TCG discussions and express our appreciation for the efforts of Ambassador Grau to ensure the proper conduct and confidentiality of the TCG negotiations. We recall Ambassador Grau's emphasis on the importance of political will to resolve this conflict. In this regard, we commend Ukraine for its constructive approach and call on Russia to reciprocate.

We regret that de-mining efforts have been compromised by the presence of new mines and UXOs, including anti-personnel mines, as observed by the SMM, posing a serious threat to both the SMM monitors and the civilian population. This week has brought more reports of civilian casualties caused by explosive objects and mines. These tragic incidents are a constant reminder of the vulnerability of the local population and underline the urgency of mine action.

We commend the SMM for constant assistance in the maintenance of critical civilian infrastructure, through its monitoring activities. Securing water, gas and electricity supplies remains fundamental for local populations in light of the approaching winter season. At the same time, we urge the sides to improve the humiliating humanitarian conditions at the entry-exit-checkpoints, while considering the COVID-related limitations. It would ease the burden on the local population.

The EU deplores any attempts to harass, intimidate or impede the work of SMM personnel and condemns the continued threats and restrictions to the SMM, which

occur predominantly in non-governmental-controlled areas. This practice hampers the SMM from fulfilling its mandate. The SMM must have safe, secure, unconditional and unimpeded access to the entire territory of Ukraine, including the areas along the Ukrainian-Russian State border, in accordance with its mandate and must not be forced to operate de facto 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 once again deplore targeting of SMM assets, including SMM UAVs, by means of signal interference and small arms fire. Those responsible for any wilful damage, destruction or loss of SMM UAVs and other assets should be held accountable, both politically and financially.

Mr. Chairman, we continue to remain deeply concerned about the dire situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Ukraine's Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol since its illegal annexation by Russia which we condemn and do not recognise. The UN Secretary General's report on the subject released on 8 October also points out to this worrying situation. Over the past six years, residents of the peninsula have been facing systematic restrictions of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, association and religion or belief. The situation of persons belonging to national minorities remains precarious. Representatives of the Crimean Tatar community face systematic persecution in the form of threats, harassment and intimidation as well as unlawful searches of their homes and enforced disappearances. We echo the urgent call of the UN Secretary General to allow unimpeded access to Crimea to international and regional human rights monitoring mechanisms. We also condemn the new wave of conscription of residents of the Crimean peninsula to the Russian Armed Forces, notably to the Black Sea Fleet and the Southern military district that borders with Ukraine. This is a clear violation of 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 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 and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as the UKRAINE, 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.