



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1281 Vienna, 17 September 2020

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

Mr. Chairperson, the European Union underlines its principled position regarding the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders. Last week, the Council of the European Union decided to further extend the validity of the EU sanctions targeting persons and entities that undermine or threaten these principles.

We reiterate our full support to the international diplomatic efforts within the Normandy process and the Trilateral Contact Group. We welcome the meeting of the Political Advisors of the Normandy Four last Friday in Berlin. It is important to capitalise on the favourable conditions deriving from the ceasefire, which has now been in place for six weeks, and the recent progress regarding security aspects within the TCG.

A lasting comprehensive ceasefire would be an important step towards a security situation that would enable the full implementation of the Minsk agreements. This is vital for a sustainable political solution to the conflict in respect for Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. Today we mark the 57th day of a relative calm at the line of contact. However, the ceasefire is fragile and we are deeply concerned about attempts to disrupt it, in particular recent incidents which resulted in casualties among Ukrainian military personnel. We condemn the unacceptable statements by the Russia-backed armed formations instigating tension and threatening to resort to violence. At the same time, we appreciate the restrained approach by Ukraine to seek solutions via the TCG to defuse these tensions. This situation underscores once more the need for ensuring proper

coordination to respond to ceasefire violations and possible similar escalations in the future. We reiterate our call on Russia to return to the Joint Centre for Control and Coordination.

The ceasefire offers a welcome respite to the civilian population which endures the brunt of this long-lasting conflict. As reported by the SMM, there have been no civilian casualties due to shelling or small-arms fire since 27 July. Still, there have been tragic incidents, with civilian casualties, involving explosive objects, grenades or mines. These incidents remind us of the continued threat posed to civilians by mines and unexploded ordnance. We call on the sides to continue working toward agreement on an updated demining plan, as well as new disengagement areas and further mutual release of detainees.

We remain deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation at the closed entry-exit-checkpoints to the non-government-controlled areas of Donetsk. The SMM has registered over one thousand civilian hardship cases where people have for example been prevented from crossing the contact line, returning to their homes or receiving medical treatment. We urge Russia to use its considerable influence over the armed formations it backs in order to remove these obstacles and ease the burden for the local population.

The safety and security of the SMM is of primary importance. We welcome the fact that the Mission's personnel was able to return to the non-government-controlled areas to resume monitoring activities. However, challenges remain. According to its mandate, the SMM should have full access to the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. All impediments to the SMM's work, which occur predominantly in the non-government controlled areas, including attempts to destroy SMM's assets, are unacceptable. Those responsible for any wilful damage, destruction or loss of SMM UAVs and other assets should be held accountable, both politically and financially. We look forward to having the results of a thorough investigation of all incidents, such as the damaging of the SMM cameras near Petrivske, Vesele and Shyrokyne, reported to the Permanent Council.

The European Union does not recognise the illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol by the Russian Federation and therefore

does not recognise the holding of elections in the Crimean peninsula, including last weekend's so-called "local elections". Anybody elected in Russia-organised voting in the Crimean peninsula and claiming to "represent" Crimea and Sevastopol will not be recognised by the EU as representatives of those territories, which are part of Ukraine.

We also continue to call on Russia to ensure unhindered and free passage to and from the Sea of Azov in accordance with international law. Any measures taken contrary to the international law have the potential to seriously undermine the security situation not only in Ukraine but also in the broader Black Sea region and beyond.

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.