



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1286 Vienna, 22 October 2020

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

Mr. Chairman, it is now three months since the additional measures were adopted, paving the way for the substantial improvement of the security situation along the contact line. The SMM reports confirm the overall adherence to the ceasefire continues. The EU welcomes this considerable achievement. However, the fact that ceasefire violations are still observed and that weapons are still present in violation of withdrawal lines, almost always in non-government control areas, is a cause of great concern and could again lead to an increase of hostilities. We once again urge the sides to keep their commitments to the ceasefire and to refrain from actions that could put it at risk. In this context, we underline the importance of a functioning coordination mechanism and reiterate our call on Russia to return to the Joint Centre for Control and Coordination.

The EU reiterates its full support for the international diplomatic efforts within the Normandy format and the Trilateral Contact Group aimed at reaching a political solution to the conflict in eastern Ukraine. We regret, however, that the political standstill within the TCG continues, making it impossible to capitalise on the security dividend. Attempts by Russia to hamper the negotiations by resorting to procedural issues and excessive demands are unacceptable. We recall that both sides have committed to conduct negotiations in good faith. In this regard, we commend Ukraine for its constructive approach and call on Russia to reciprocate. We renew our call for further progress with regard to demining, new disengagement areas, the new entry-exit check points and exchange of detainees. We regret that the ICRC has not been granted full access to the detainees in the non-government controlled areas.

We remain concerned about the restrictions faced by the SMM, in particular in the areas adjacent to the Ukraine-Russia State border outside the control of the Ukrainian government. Despite the restrictions, the Mission was still able, by the use of remote monitoring, to confirm once again uncontrolled transfers across the border, which continue to destabilize the conflict areas. For instance, on the night of 13 October, the SMM spotted three trains with unidentified cargo at the railway station in Voznesenivka in close proximity to the Ukraine-Russia State border. Moreover, on 16 October an SMM long-range UAV observed convoys of military trucks unloading cargo and crossing the State border between Ukraine and Russia on an unpaved road, in a non-government-controlled area of the Donetsk region near Manych where there are no border crossing facilities. Such cases illustrate the urgent need to strengthen transparency across the uncontrolled segment of the border.

Regrettably, the SMM assets, in particular SMM UAVs, are subjected to constant targeting by signal interference and small arms fire. Last week was no exception and on 16 October the SMM lost control over one of its aircraft. 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 strongly deplores any attempts to harass, intimidate or impede the work of SMM personnel. We condemn the continued threats and restrictions to the SMM, which occur predominantly in non-governmental-controlled areas and hamper 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 Ukraine-Russia 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 influence over the armed formations it backs to ensure that all undue restrictions on the SMM are removed.

The EU calls upon the Russian Federation to continue the trilateral negotiations between Australia, the Netherlands and the Russian Federation with regard to the downing of flight MH17. After more than six years since this tragic event the 298 victims and their next of kin deserve justice. The EU supports all efforts to establish truth, justice and accountability, in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2166.

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, 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.