



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation N°1005
Vienna, 23 March 2022

EU Statement on Russia's ongoing military aggression against Ukraine

Mr. Chair, today is the 28th day since President Putin started Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. This war brings **grave humanitarian consequences** and **immeasurable suffering** for Ukrainians, with thousands of civilians killed and many more injured or traumatized. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, as of last Sunday, **one quarter of Ukrainians, more than 10 million persons**, mostly women and children, **have fled their homes** in search of safe shelter. We are working at all levels to provide humanitarian, medical, logistical and financial aid to Ukraine as well as to all refugees and the countries hosting them.

As it becomes increasingly clear that a quick victory is not possible, **Russia's military strategy** in Ukraine **seems to be evolving to a war of attrition** and to the indiscriminate use of particularly destructive types of weapons. This means besieging cities in Ukraine, deliberately targeting civilians in densely populated areas and even those fleeing the war zones and indiscriminately attacking civilian infrastructure, including hospitals. This form of warfare is illegal and inhuman, it is contrary to international humanitarian law and can amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. The recent ultimatum to Mariupol, a city home to 400,000 people before the war that is currently under siege and constant bombardment, – to surrender in order to allow safe passage – speaks clearly about the Russian strategy and tactics.

Last week, we recalled in this Forum the provisions of paragraph 31 of the Code of Conduct about the individual accountability of members of armed forces with command authority **for the unlawful exercise** of such authority and for orders contrary to national and international law. Russia must **abide by international humanitarian law**, notably the Geneva conventions. Evidence of violations of IHL and war crimes will be carefully documented and preserved. All those responsible will be held accountable. In this vein, we welcome the decision of the International Criminal Court's prosecutor to open an investigation inter alia into possible war crimes by Russia in Ukraine. We also welcome the unequivocal order of the International Court of Justice, issued last week, and the provisional measures indicated by the Court. This order confirms, at the current procedural stage, that the Russian aggression against Ukraine is illegal and has to cease immediately.

In Russia, through its propaganda proxies, **the Kremlin actively incites militarism and chauvinism, while brutally denying freedom of speech and other fundamental rights to the Russian people**. The Russian authorities deny the most basic right to say "no to war". We strongly condemn Russia's propaganda and disinformation campaign, at all levels, including regrettably in this Forum.

Cracks have been showing in this Potemkin-style propaganda. How incredulous is the assertion by Foreign Minister Lavrov where he says "we didn't attack Ukraine". How can anybody believe the claims that this full-scale war of aggression is merely a so called "special military operation"? More than once, Russian politicians stated that the Russian Armed Forces were not targeting civilian infrastructure in Ukraine. The many pictures from Ukrainian cities, including from Mariupol and its bombed hospital, Kharkiv, Kyiv and Sumy provide tangible evidence of the contrary. Furthermore the Russian Ministry of Defence had to admit that conscripts also have to fight on the territory of Ukraine, which had been vehemently denied by President Putin only a few days before. In the meantime, reports revealed how dead bodies of Russian soldiers are filling up Belarusian morgues. Do these bodies simply not exist? Are they just, to put it in Gogol's words, "dead souls", unaccounted for by their State?

Mr Chair, let us be clear: the use of chemical and biological weapons anywhere, at any time, by anyone and under any circumstances is unacceptable and contravenes international law prohibiting the use of such weapons. Russia's continued disinformation attempts **about biological labs and chemical weapons** in Ukraine don't have any substance or credibility. Ukraine has been faithfully implementing its obligations under UNSCR 1540 and a number of other organisations, including the OSCE and the EU have been providing assistance in this regard. As it was pointed out last week by our US colleague Russia itself had been benefiting from similar assistance for years. **In the event of a biological or chemical incident, Russia would bear full responsibility.**

We remain extremely concerned by the nuclear safety, security and safeguard risks caused by the Russian invasion on Ukraine and the potential damage to its nuclear facilities that could have a significantly adverse impact with potentially severe consequences for human health and the environment. Recent reports about the capture by Russia of a modern laboratory at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, as referred to by the Ukrainian delegation this morning, are also highly worrying.

Mr. Chair, **Russia alone bears full responsibility for this senseless war**, for the loss of life, the injuries, the destruction and the devastation of entire cities. The EU and its Member States demand that Russia immediately and unconditionally cease its military actions, withdraw all its troops from the entire territory of Ukraine and fully respect Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders and territorial waters. The vote of 141 to 5 at the UN General Assembly on 2 March 2022 speaks for itself.

We also **call on Belarus to stop enabling and supporting the Russian aggression** by providing its territory to the attack on its neighbour. This is a shameless act of the Lukashenka regime.

Mr. Chair, the **EU** and its Member States resolutely **support Ukraine's inherent right to self-defence**, and the Ukrainian Armed Forces' efforts to defend Ukraine's territorial integrity and population in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter.

We will continue to provide coordinated political, financial, material and humanitarian support. We stand with Ukraine!

Thank you!

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, and ALBANIA*, the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, GEORGIA, ANDORRA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

[Alignment paragraph]