



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation N°878 Vienna, 7 March 2018

EU Statement on the Security situation in and around Ukraine

It has been four years since Russia's illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. The EU and its Member States remain steadfast in its condemnation of this act which violates international law, the OSCE rules and principles and therefore remains a direct challenge to international security, with grave implications for the international legal order that protects the unity and sovereignty of all States. We do not and will not recognise it. The EU remains firmly committed to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

We remain concerned by the volatile security situation in eastern Ukraine. Over the last week (19-25 February) the Mission recorded more ceasefire violations and a fourfold increase in the use of Minsk-proscribed weapons, including explosions of MLRS rockets and artillery rounds. We deeply regret the continued negative impact of this violence on civilians. The SMM reported again about civilian casualties and fresh impact sites and damage from shelling and gunfire to civilian properties in residential areas. This is unacceptable and we deplore such behaviour.

We welcome the recommitment of all sides to "a comprehensive, sustainable and unlimited ceasefire starting from 5 March 2018" and call on the sides to strictly adhere to it. The recommitment needs to be matched by concrete actions, including the withdrawal of heavy weapons, disengagement of forces and hardware and de-mining. To this end, we look forward to practical implementation of the sides' intention to conduct the disengagement of forces and hardware in the area of Stanytsia Luhanska on the condition of full compliance with the ceasefire.

Mr. Chairperson, we strongly condemn the incident that took place on 5 March near a checkpoint in non-government controlled Kozatske, where a man in military-style clothing pointed his rifle directly at the SMM vehicle and threatened to shoot at the SMM if the patrol came any closer. Such intimidation of our monitors, occurring almost exclusively in

separatist-controlled areas, is unacceptable and must stop immediately. During the last couple of weeks the SMM has reported several incidents putting at risk the lives of our monitors and their technical equipment. We are gravely concerned that in the evening of 23 February eight SMM staff at the Forward Patrol Base in government-controlled Popasna had to seek shelter in the basement due to outgoing mortar rounds only 500 meters away. Because of the incident, the SMM needed to relocate its monitors and is again prevented from observing possible ceasefire violations in this hot spot area.

Since the beginning of 2018, there have been a total of 13 incidents of small arms fire directed at SMM UAVs. On 16 February shots were fired from the vicinity of a so-called "LPR" position near Sentianivka, after which the SMM lost contact with the device. Two hours later so-called "LPR" members returned the UAV to the SMM with a bullet hole through one of its motors. On 21 February a UAV was shot at near government-controlled Kostiantynivka. We strongly condemn any threats directed towards our monitors as well as destruction of their technical equipment and recall that the mandate calls for full, safe and unhindered access throughout Ukraine including along the Ukrainian-Russian border and on the Crimean peninsula.

SMM freedom of movement was restricted 28 times in the period of 19-25 February in in areas held by Russia-backed separatists and once in government-controlled areas. In areas outside of government control, members of the armed formations denied the SMM access to five border areas of Luhansk region outside government control near the Russian Federation. The SMM visited for instance a border crossing point near Izvaryne six times, and on each occasion so called "LPR" members told the SMM to leave the area. Armed men also again prevented the SMM from approaching Siedove, a town outside of government control and near the border with the Russian Federation. Such restrictions are unacceptable and do little to allay speculations about reasons behind these attempts to hide facts on the ground. Without proper and unimpeded monitoring by the SMM, there cannot be a verified improvement of the security situation, which is the basis for further progress on the political track.

We reiterate our concerns over Russia's withdrawal from the JCCC. Due to this unilateral step, a number of important repair works have been stalled due to a lack of security guarantees in areas outside government control. We reiterate our call on the Russian Federation to return to the JCCC. We also call on Russia and Ukraine to re-establish the functionality of the JCCC and to strengthen cooperation within its framework.

Mr. Chairman, on 22 February 2018, the 72nd Russian Convoy entered Ukrainian territory at the Donetsk Border Crossing Point, as reported by the OSCE Observer Mission. We deeply regret that, once again, this happened without a full inspection by the Ukrainian border guards and in violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity. This does little to allay concerns about the possible military nature of the transported cargo.

We call on all sides to swiftly and fully implement the Minsk agreements and honour their commitments in full. We underline Russia's responsibility in this regard and once again call on Russia to use its considerable influence over the separatists it backs, to meet these commitments in full. We reiterate our deep concern regarding information about the presence of military equipment and personnel from Russia in the conflict zone. We call on Russia to immediately stop providing financial and military support to the separatists. The ceasefire must be respected. All Minsk-regulated weapons must be withdrawn. All foreign armed formations, military equipment and mercenaries must be removed from Ukraine. Re-establishing full Ukrainian control over its state border is essential.

We recall our unwavering support to the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders, and call upon Russia to do likewise. We urge Russia to recognize these fundamental principles that it has itself invoked many times and to contribute, by acts and public pronouncements, to stabilise the situation and reverse moves that contravene these principles.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA, ANDORRA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.