



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1253 Vienna, 19 December 2019

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

1. Mr. Chairperson, the year 2019 is coming to an end. This gives us yet another occasion for reflection and a reminder of the basic principles which we stand for. For us, the European Union and its Member States, it is of utmost importance to take the floor in this forum on every occasion on this particular current issue. We raise our voice here in defence of international law, its fundamental principles and, in particular, the principles and commitments lying at the heart of this Organisation, as enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act, i.e. sovereign equality of participating States, refraining from the threat or use of force, respect of the territorial integrity of the participating States and inviolability of frontiers.
2. The EU strongly rejects the geopolitical approach based on the spheres of influence. This is a relic of the past which has no place in the OSCE. All the participating States have the inherent right to freely choose the course of their foreign and security policy. They also have therefore the right to trade, develop economic relations with whomever they wish, without being exposed to threats or blackmail. The use of force against any participating State and violations of its territorial integrity, through acts of aggression or attempts of annexation, are simply unacceptable.

3. Mr. Chairperson, the past few months saw remarkable progress in the three disengagement areas, including the long-awaited repair of the bridge in Stanytsia Luhanska. We are also encouraged by the constructive Normandy Four Summit talks which took place in Paris on 9 December after more than 3 years. The Summit resulted in an agreement on a set of steps, which, if implemented, will have a positive humanitarian effect on the civilian population along the contact line and may also bring new impetus towards a sustainable political solution of the conflict, in full respect of the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence of Ukraine. In this context, we commend the Ukrainian leadership for the constructive approach and the political will to negotiate an end to the conflict. We also welcome the decision on the next Summit in four months to bring continuity. We also note the extension by the Ukrainian Parliament last week of the current Special Status Law for certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions by one year.

4. Implementation of the ceasefire is urgently needed as stated in the N4 Summit commonly agreed conclusions: “The sides commit to a full and comprehensive implementation of the ceasefire, strengthened by the implementation of all necessary ceasefire support measures, before the end of the year 2019”. Over thirteen thousand lives have been lost because of this conflict, with many more wounded, and the human toll is still rising on a weekly if not daily basis, with 145 civilian casualties counted by the SMM in 2019. We deplore that, recently, more lives were lost.

5. Moreover, we hope to see very soon the designation of new checkpoints for crossing the contact line and the release and exchange of conflict-related detainees, based on the principle of “all for all”, starting with “all identified for all identified”, as agreed in the N4 summit, and we welcome the fact that the sides reaffirmed the necessity to grant the International Committee of the Red Cross full and unconditional access to all detained persons.

6. The EU strongly supports the full implementation of the SMM's mandate of 2014 as reaffirmed by N4. The SMM must have safe, secure, unconditional and unimpeded access to the entire territory of Ukraine. This includes the illegally annexed Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol and along the Ukraine-Russia state border, to which the SMM is systematically denied access by Russia-backed armed formations. 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.
7. We regret that Russia persists with the so-called "humanitarian convoys", some of which enter military compounds, in clear violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as of fundamental international humanitarian principles. We once again call on Russia to join an international mechanism for the delivery of humanitarian aid and to desist from its current practice, which is incompatible with basic principles of international law.
8. We reiterate our utmost concern about the Russian presidential decrees and their extensions, enabling the simplified granting of Russian citizenship to Ukrainian citizens, which constitutes yet another attack on the sovereignty of Ukraine and runs counter to the spirit and objectives of the Minsk agreements. We do not recognise these passports issued on the basis of these decrees and we call on other OSCE participating States to do likewise.
9. In a side-event at the MC in Bratislava, also co-sponsored by EU MS, we met Oleg Sentsov and Roman Sushchenko, the two Ukrainians that were returned home by Russia on September 7. Last week we were deeply saddened by the news from the military court in Rostov sentencing Mr. Enver Seytosmanov, a

Crimean Tatar arrested in Sevastopol in May last year, to 17 years of maximum-security imprisonment. We regret that Mr. Seytosmanov and dozens of other Ukrainian nationals, including Crimean Tatars, continue to be held illegally in Russian prisons, and call on Russia for their immediate and unconditional release.

10. We continue to call on Russia to ensure unhindered and free passage to and from the Sea of Azov in accordance with international law. We are deeply worried by reports of a sharp increase in waiting times in the Kerch Strait in November for vessels heading to or from the Ukrainian ports in the Sea of Azov.

11. 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.

12. 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.

13. Finally, as it is our last PC this year, we wish to express our gratitude to the outgoing Slovak Chairmanship for keeping the issue of the conflict in eastern Ukraine high on the OSCE agenda throughout the whole year and in particular to the CiO Minister Miroslav Lajčák for his personal engagement and tireless efforts in facilitating a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

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 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.