



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1226 Vienna, 2 May 2019

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

Mr. Chairperson, the EU as well as other delegations around this table stress every week in the Permanent Council the need to fully implement the Minsk agreements to achieve a sustainable political solution to the conflict in eastern Ukraine in line with OSCE principles and commitments, and in full respect of Ukraine’s independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders. The Russian decree, inciting Ukrainian citizens residing in areas controlled by Russia-backed armed formations to apply for Russian citizenship, signed by President Putin on 24 April is a worrying development and yet another attack on Ukraine’s sovereignty by Russia. This decision, immediately after Ukraine’s Presidential election, which demonstrated Ukraine’s strong attachment to democracy and the rule of law, clearly shows Russia’s intention to further destabilise Ukraine and to exacerbate the conflict rather than engaging in constructive dialogue with the Ukrainian authorities. In the same context, we are also aware that President Putin signed another decree on 1 May and we will be following closely all developments regarding citizenship and expediting passports. We call on Russia to refrain from actions that jeopardise the implementation of the Minsk agreements and impede the full reintegration of the areas controlled by Russia-backed armed formations into Ukraine.

Sadly, the civilian population continues to pay the highest toll of the conflict. This conflict is a result of acts of aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine.

The ongoing armed violence poses a serious threat to the lives of civilians living in the vicinity of the contact line and further adds to their hardship by damage to residential houses and critical infrastructure. This is why we deeply regret that the sides could not reach consensus in the TCG on the recommitment to ceasefire on the occasion of the Easter festivities. Lasting ceasefire, disengagement of forces and comprehensive demining are important steps toward a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Last week, we remembered the SMM medic Joseph Stone, who was tragically killed two years ago when an SMM armoured vehicle was struck by an explosion, most likely caused by an anti-tank mine in an area control by Russia-backed armed formations near Pryshyb in Luhansk region. This sad anniversary, and the fact that over 56 civilians have been killed and 158 injured from mines and unexploded ordnance in the past two years, is a strong reminder of the urgent need to implement commitments to remove mines and to stop laying new ones. We call on the sides to fully comply with these commitments and urge immediate and comprehensive demining. In this context, the passing of the mine action amendment in the Verkhovna Rada, which should allow continued direct donor assistance to Ukraine, is a positive step.

Mr. Chairman, the SMM is an unarmed civilian mission, with a mandate supported by all participating States. The mission serves all of us by providing first-hand and objective information about the situation on the ground. We deplore any impediments to the Mission's work, including restrictions to its freedom of movement, occurring predominantly in areas controlled by Russia-backed armed formations. The SMM must have safe, secure and unhindered access throughout Ukraine. This includes the illegally annexed Crimean peninsula and the Ukraine-Russia state border to which the SMM is systematically denied access which we condemn.

We are deeply concerned about and we condemn the continued targeting and jamming of the SMM's technical assets. On 19 April an SMM long-range UAV crashed near the contact line in the Donetsk region most probably as a result of jamming. This is the third case over one year and extremely disturbing. Further, on 25 April a mid-range UAV crashed near non-government controlled Asov and two

mini-UAVs were subject to small arms fire at the same location on 27 April. We reiterate that the operational, security and financial consequences of all obstructions of SMM UAVs must be assessed. We are deeply concerned about the losses which have a substantial negative impact on the operational effectiveness of the SMM. Those responsible for any wilful damage, destruction or loss of SMM UAVs and other assets should be held accountable, both politically and financially.

Our position on the unjustified use of force by Russia at the Kerch Strait on 25 November 2018 and its negative impact in the Azov Sea and Russia's violations of international law is well known. We strongly call on Russia to release the crew members and return their vessels unconditionally and without delay. While the sailors remain detained, Russia must respect their right to legal representation, unhindered access by consular authorities, and ensure that all crewmen receive appropriate medical treatment as several of them were wounded during the capture. The EU has responded to the escalation at the Kerch Strait by adding Russian officials to the list of those subject to restrictive measure in respect of actions undermining or threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine. We expect Russia to ensure unhindered and free passage through the Kerch Strait to and from the Azov Sea, in accordance with international law. The increasing militarisation of Crimea continues to impact negatively the security situation in the Black Sea region. We encourage the SMM to continue its monitoring and reporting on the situation in the coastal area of the Sea of Azov.

We remain deeply worried about the deteriorating human rights situation in the illegally annexed Crimea. We echo RFoM Desir's statement of 17 April condemning the continued deterioration of freedom of expression and the safety of journalists on the peninsula. We condemn the practice of silencing critical voices in Crimea, including the cases of citizen journalists Osman Arifmemetov, Rustem Sheikhaliyev and Remzi Bekirov arrested on terrorism charges along with about 20 other residents of Crimea.

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. Re-

engagement in good faith in the Normandy format talks and discussions at the Trilateral Contact Group in Minsk is urgently needed. 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 information on 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 NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, UKRAINE and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

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