



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation N°947
Vienna, 27 May 2020

EU Statement on the security situation in and around Ukraine

Mr. Chairperson, the European Union and its Member States regret the volatile security situation in eastern Ukraine. Of particular concern is a spike in the number of civilian casualties not seen for the last two years. The SMM also reported more ceasefire violations attributable to mortar and artillery rounds, weapons that should have been withdrawn according to the Minsk agreements, as well as ceasefire violations and presence of persons in the disengagement areas in Zolote and Petrivske or further fortifications near former positions of the Russia-backed armed formations inside the disengagement zone in Petrivske

We had hoped that the decrease in ceasefire violations recorded by the SMM in the weekly report issued last Wednesday would translate into a positive trend. However, the rise of tensions last week, aggravated by the threats by one of the de facto leaders of the Russia-backed armed formations “to move the Line of Contact” is another proof of the volatility of the situation on the ground and a stark reminder of the need of comprehensive ceasefire. We commend Ukraine for its restraint and requesting an extraordinary TCG meeting and Ambassador Grau for promptly organising it last Friday in order to diffuse these new tensions.

Mr. Chairperson, we reiterate our full support to the efforts of the Trilateral Contact Group and the Normandy Format in working towards a sustainable political solution to the conflict, in full respect of the sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. It is therefore very important that the sides take the

necessary steps to implement the common agreed conclusions of the Paris N4 Summit of December in good faith, notably recommitment to full and comprehensive ceasefire, and bring their discussions on other issues, such as further release of conflict-related detainees, agreement on new disengagement areas and opening of new EECPs, as well as de-mining activities to a positive conclusion. In this context, the EU commends the constructive approach displayed by Ukraine and calls on Russia to act likewise, including within the TCG.

We wish once again to underline the importance of safety and security of the SMM. The Mission is facing an increasingly dangerous situation on the ground, with a rising number of shellings and explosions in the close vicinity of its patrols. On 15 May, when an SMM patrol was monitoring adherence to a localized ceasefire to facilitate repairs of water infrastructure in the south-western edge of Berezivske (in non-government-controlled area), several projectiles exploded near their position. Last Friday another very grave incident occurred in Vesela Hora (in non-government-controlled area), 16 km north of Luhansk, where an SMM patrol, supervising a previously announced mini-UAV flight, was exposed to extremely close small arms fire and had to leave the scene without retrieving the mini-UAV. We firmly condemn such violent acts as they constitute a direct risk to our Mission staff and must be investigated fully. Ensuring the safety and security of Mission staff and assets is a responsibility of all participating States.

We also recall the importance of the Mission's technical assets, even more so during the current circumstances, for the SMM's ability to implement its mandate and regret the increase in reported incidents of signal interference or firing at UAVs. Those responsible for any wilful damage, destruction or loss of SMM UAVs and other assets should be held accountable, both politically and financially.

Furthermore, we reiterate our grave concern about the continuing restrictions of movement the SMM is facing in non-government-controlled areas under the pretext of the COVID-19 pandemic. We strongly condemn these restrictions and recall that they constitute a violation of the mandate of the Mission and run against provisions of the Minsk agreements. We urge Russia to use its considerable influence over the armed formations it backs in order to meet the Minsk commitments in full and to stop this hindrance of the SMM to fulfil its mandate.

We remain firm in our 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. Respect for these principles and commitments must be restored. We underline Russia's responsibility in this regard and once again call on Russia to use its considerable influence over the armed formations it backs to meet these commitments in full. We reiterate our deep concern 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 armed formations. 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 recognised borders and call upon Russia to do likewise. We urge Russia to recognise 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. 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 express our deep concern about the ongoing large-scale militarisation of the Crimean peninsula by Russia, which continues to impact the security situation in the Black Sea region and beyond.

The Candidate Countries the REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA, MONTENEGRO, ALBANIA, the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, 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 Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.