



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1247 Vienna, 14 November 2019

EU Statement in response to the Address by the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Peter Maurer

The European Union warmly welcomes President Peter Maurer of the ICRC to the Permanent Council. Mr President, we thank you for your statement. We take this opportunity to pay tribute to the unique work carried out by the ICRC in challenging contexts worldwide and reassure you of the EU continuous support in this regard.

Recalling the 2009 EU Guidelines on International Humanitarian Law, we reiterate our commitment to promoting compliance with international humanitarian law. We reiterate our commitment to the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence and to preventing politicisation of humanitarian aid.

We highly value the ICRC as an independent, neutral organization ensuring humanitarian protection and assistance for victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence.

We are currently collaborating in raising awareness about the all too often existent dangers of providing health-care in conflict situations. We should continue addressing the widespread and severe impact of all acts that obstruct the delivery of healthcare, damage or destroy facilities and vehicles, and injure or kill healthcare workers and patients.

Within the OSCE region, the OSCE and ICRC have different responsibilities, but they complement each other.

The grave humanitarian crisis caused by the conflict in eastern Ukraine and the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol continues to affect millions of civilians. Reports by the ICRC, the UN as well as the OSCE have documented the severe patterns of human rights violations and abuses. As one of few humanitarian actors operating in non-government controlled areas in eastern Ukraine, your work on the ground to restore vital infrastructure, including access to drinking water, to deliver humanitarian aid to those in need, to train children and adults about mine risks, as well as your work related to detainees and missing persons is crucial. Helping children living along the contact line to avoid the dangers of conflict is another example of your vital work. However, the ICRC still faces severe restrictions, particularly in non-government controlled areas, and continues to be denied access to the illegally annexed Crimea. Guaranteed safe and unimpeded humanitarian access throughout Ukraine is vital. The ICRC and the OSCE have also been working closely on the issue of exchange of detainees in the Ukraine conflict. We call for the ICRC to receive full, safe and unimpeded access to all detainees and prisoners.

The OSCE area remains scarred by protracted conflicts and by difficult post-conflict situations. Our efforts in the OSCE go towards resolution of protracted conflicts and improving the situation of those affected. We commend the work of the ICRC in protecting the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflicts worldwide. In the OSCE region, we appreciate your work on missing persons, visiting detention facilities, and local confidence building measures. This is a concrete and valuable contribution towards our shared goal of stability and peace. However, humanitarian action cannot be a substitute for political solutions and we are determined to continue to push for political solutions of all these conflicts.

Forced displacement on a large scale continues to be a challenge also in the OSCE area. The work of the EU and of its Member States is beginning to yield results on the path towards a system for managing migration – jointly, sustainably, and in a manner respectful of human rights. Providing support and protection to people in

need is a challenge that requires a global response and one in which the EU is actively engaged. In this regard, we value the work of the ICRC directed towards responding to the needs of the most vulnerable ones, by keeping families together, reuniting them, clarifying the fate and whereabouts of missing people and supporting their families, and ensuring proper and dignified handling of human remains and other forensic services.

In concluding, we reiterate our respect and support to the ICRC staff in Geneva and all over the world who carry out their duty often in the most dangerous circumstances. We wish you, Mr. President, every success in carrying out your important humanitarian mission.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, 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.