



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1296 Vienna, 17 December 2020

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

Mr. Chairperson, as the year 2020 comes to an end, we would like to reflect on the situation in Ukraine and developments in this conflict that have caused the EU to raise its voice – week after week – on this current issue.

The European Union will always stand in defence of international law and the OSCE commitments and principles enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris. This is why we support Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. We will therefore continue to condemn the acts of aggression by the Russian armed forces in eastern Ukraine and Russia’s illegal annexation of Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol and call on Russia to reverse these actions. We are grateful to the Albanian Chairpersonship for keeping this conflict high on the OSCE agenda throughout the year.

The most significant achievement of 2020 was the agreement on the implementation of the additional measures to strengthen the ceasefire on 27 July. Since then, the ceasefire has largely held, even though there is unfortunately a gradual increase in ceasefire violations. This month, there were two civilian casualties due to shelling as well as damage to a private house. The presence of mines and unexploded ordnance continues to constitute a serious risk to civilians.

The European Union regrets that the ceasefire has so far not led to progress within the Trilateral Contact Group. The provisional agreements on four new disengagement areas and updated mine action lack the necessary decisions to begin implementation, because one of the sides links them to political considerations instead of focusing on the issues at hand. This is unfortunate: when negotiations are stalled, the risk of hostilities on the ground increases. We also regret the continuing

blockade of the opening of the two new crossing points near Zolote and Schastie by the Russia-backed armed formations. We commend Ukraine for its readiness to move forward on these issues as well as for its decision to prolong the Law on the Special Status for certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts of Ukraine until the end of 2021. We call on Russia, as a participant of the TCG, to reciprocate in a similar constructive spirit and to use its influence in order to improve the humanitarian situation at the contact line.

Throughout the year, the SMM has faced restrictions on its freedom of movement, predominantly in the non-government controlled areas. The SMM has taken stringent measures in view of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the Russia-backed armed formations are using the pandemic as a pretext to impose further restrictions on the SMM such as the need to quarantine when travelling across the contact line. The restrictions have de facto divided the mission into three separate parts which has impeded the SMM's ability to operate with the necessary flexibility. We urge Russia to use its considerable influence over the armed formations it backs to reverse all impediments to the SMM's work. The SMM must have unhindered access throughout the whole territory of Ukraine, including in the border areas near the uncontrolled segment of Ukrainian-Russian state border and in the Crimean peninsula.

The European Union reiterates its call for improving the dire human rights situation in the illegally annexed Crimea. We also condemn the ongoing militarization of the Crimean peninsula by the Russian Federation and the presence of Russian troops as being contrary to the national sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine, expressed in the UN General Assembly resolution of 7 December 2020. We regret the build-up of forces and the holding of Russian military exercises in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov regions thus threatening the security of this region and the entire OSCE area. We are also seriously concerned about the transfers of advanced weapon systems including nuclear-capable aircraft and missiles, weapons, ammunition and military personnel to the territory of Ukraine and the illegal seizure and establishment of control by Russia over the former nuclear weapons storage sites in Crimea. We call on Russia to refrain from unlawful military-related activities in Crimea, the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, which would further exacerbate tensions in the region and beyond. We also recall our position on the

illegal conscription of residents of the Crimean peninsula into the Armed Forces of Russia, which is in violation of international law.

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 the 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 fueling 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 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 REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, and the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, 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.