



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE 88th Joint FSC - PC Meeting Vienna, 12 July 2023

---

#### EU Statement on Security and Environment Nexus

---

The European Union and its Member States commend the OSCE Chair of North Macedonia and the FSC Chair of Bulgaria for organising this meeting devoted to the growingly important subject of the security and environment nexus. We also thank the distinguished speakers for their valuable contributions.

The relationship between environment and security is a two-way street: environmental phenomena can lead to or aggravate tensions within societies as well as external tensions and conflicts; at the same time, conflicts, and especially armed conflicts, can be a direct and indirect cause of environmental decay and additionally fuel the climate crisis. In the face of such a multidimensional and global challenge, the OSCE, as the world's largest regional security organisation, is particularly well positioned, including with its Conflict Cycle tools, to foster dialogue and further explore co-operation on the security and environment nexus.

Russia's illegal, brutal, unjustifiable and unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine, a gross violation of international law, including the UN Charter, and OSCE principles and commitments, has caused not only immense human suffering, but also massive environmental damage and increased risks to nuclear safety in Ukraine and beyond. This aggression not only poisoned the security environment but is literally a toxic war.

Ukraine, as part of the so-called “Green Heart of Europe”, is threatened by an ecological catastrophe of major proportions. The home of 35% of Europe’s biodiversity is now under threat. The preliminary results of the OSCE project “Assessment of environmental impacts of the war against Ukraine and options for remediation” depict a grim picture. We commend the work and the commitment of the Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities in addressing and alleviating the consequences of Russia’s war of aggression. Ukraine now faces high ecological risks with regard to air, water and soil contamination, as a direct result of Russia’s war of aggression. Other ramifications of hostilities such as forest fires also pose immediate threats and add to the long-term damage.

Russia’ war of aggression against Ukraine has reached an unprecedented level of devastation with the destruction of the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant dam, which we condemn in the strongest possible terms. The resulting flooding is both an environmental and humanitarian catastrophe as it aggravates the already dire situation of the civilian population in the areas affected. Dropping water levels also affect access to critical cooling water for the reactors of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, putting at risk its safety and security systems. We recall that intentionally directing attacks against civilian objects may amount to a war crime.

The Ukrainian authorities have already recorded 2.445 cases of environmental damage and the losses are estimated at 51.3 billion EUR. The destruction of the Kakhovka dam alone has an estimated environmental damage of 4 billion USD. Besides, due to ongoing fighting and the illegal occupation by Russia, the situation in parts of Ukrainian territory remains difficult to assess. However, it is clear that the impact of Russia’s war of aggression goes beyond the direct ecological destruction. The war also diverts important resources from necessary conservation, protection and other environmental activities. The EU fully supports international mechanisms aimed at registering the damages that Russia has inflicted in Ukraine.

When talking about security and environment, the interlinkage with the triple crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution is obvious. As the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, stated: “A better understanding of the relationship between conflict and climate change is crucial”. The OSCE High-Level Conference on Climate Change, which took place last Friday, is an example of the Organisation’s potential to address these urgent global challenges. The FSC with its politico-military perspective

can also contribute to advancing work on these closely connected issues. We would like to particularly emphasize at today's meeting two issues in this regard: military remnants of war and International Humanitarian Law (IHL).

The first topic relates to the different weapons and military equipment and debris which is scattered all over Ukraine. As a result of Russia's aggression, Ukraine has become one of the world's most mine-contaminated countries, including its most fertile lands. It will take years to clear the territory of the remnants of war. The OSCE should play a significant role in supporting Ukraine in this regard, including through the Support Programme for Ukraine.

Mitigating the adverse effects of conflict on the environment starts long before the conflict. For example, in EU Member states initiatives are taken to assist the armed forces in tackling their habits of consumption, in increasing energy efficiency, reducing emissions of greenhouse gasses as well as improving water and waste management when preparing for operations and while conducting them.

Chairs, international humanitarian law includes the obligation to protect the natural environment, as also reflected in the OSCE Code of Conduct. Intentionally launching an attack that causes "widespread, long-term and severe damage to the natural environment", is defined in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court as a war crime.

The concept note raises the question about the roles of the FSC and the OSCE in addressing the cross-cutting matters of today's debate. In this regard, we believe that further discussing and advancing cooperation on these issues, including in security dialogues and with a cross-dimensional approach, alongside with initiatives of practical assistance already in place, will certainly enable the OSCE to better deliver on the environment and security nexus. We are ready to contribute to this endeavour.

The OSCE cannot afford to lag behind in addressing such existential threats. Strong partnerships are needed to address these global challenges. Therefore we welcome and encourage increased joint work between the EU, the UN, the OSCE and NATO. Partnerships are one of the four main priorities of the recent EU Joint Communication, which aims to better integrate the climate, environment, peace and security nexus in the EU's external policies.

In conclusion, allow us to quote UNEP Executive Director Inger Andersen: “The environment is about people”. This echoes the CiO’s motto. It also sums up our approach towards the Russian aggression: we will continue to stand with Ukraine and its people and will continue holding Russia to account.

The Candidate Countries NORTH MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\*, ALBANIA\*, UKRAINE, REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA and BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA\*, the Potential Candidate Country GEORGIA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, as well as ANDORRA, MONACO and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

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