



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1235 Vienna, 11 July 2019

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

Mr. Chairman, regretfully the number of ceasefire violations in eastern Ukraine increased over the past week, as reported in the latest weekly report by the SMM. The EU strongly condemns shelling of residential areas, placing military hardware near civilian infrastructure and exposing civilians to further threats. We are alarmed that 28 civilian casualties occurred in June and in the beginning of July. Mines and UXO pose an imminent threat to the civilian population. We deplore that on 2 July seven children were injured due to unexploded ordnance in Dnipropetrovsk region. Also in the last week, five people sustained injuries due to shelling and small-arms fire and a man died after explosion of a device, all in non-government controlled areas. We reiterate our call to disengage, withdraw heavy weapons and step up efforts on comprehensive mine action.

The EU welcomes the disengagement of forces and military hardware in Stanytsia Luhanska, as observed and documented by the SMM. We call on all sides to take all necessary steps to keep the momentum and ensure the long-term sustainability of the process. On 7 July 2019, President of the European Council Donald Tusk joined President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on a visit to the disengagement area. They reached the destroyed bridge in Stanytsia Luhanska, which should urgently be rebuilt for the sake of thousands of civilians crossing it every day. We would welcome further signs of progress towards a lasting ceasefire, including in the disengagement areas of Petrivske and Zolote.

We acknowledge the talks held in the format of the Trilateral Contact Group, yet we regret that no agreement on the so called “harvest” ceasefire was found at the meeting of July 2. We call on the sides to show the necessary political will to stop violence and ease human suffering and to work towards a permanent and sustainable ceasefire. We hope that the meeting scheduled for 17 July will produce the urgently needed tangible results.

We strongly deplore any attempts to harass, intimidate or impede the work of SMM monitors. We deplore that the Mission’s safety continues to be endangered by shelling and small-arms fire in its proximity. On 4 July small-arms rounds from a north-north-west position were fired in the direction of the SMM patrol in the Zolote disengagement area, posing a direct threat to SMM patrol members.

The EU strongly condemns the increasing targeting and jamming of the SMM UAVs. We are worried about the loss of yet another Long Range UAV on 27 June near Zaichenko, 26 km north-east of Mariupol. We note with concern that 22 of the 25 mini-UAV flights conducted during the search for the lost Long Range UAV experienced jamming. Those responsible for any willful damage, destruction or loss of SMM UAVs and other assets should be held accountable, both politically and financially.

Unfortunately, in the reported period restrictions and other impediments to the SMM’s monitoring persisted, mostly in non-government-controlled areas. We are deeply concerned about the systematic restrictions to the SMM’s freedom of movement, of which 90 percent occur in non-government controlled areas, and call on Russia to assume its responsibility in this regard and use its influence over the armed formations it backs to meet the Minsk commitments in full.

The EU welcomes the SMM’s continued efforts to monitor not only the security situation, but also respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. In this context, we are concerned that the Mission’s ability to monitor respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in non-government-controlled areas remain limited. We reiterate our concerns about the deteriorating human rights situation in illegally-annexed Crimea and the city of Sevastopol and urge for full compliance with international human rights standards. The EU strongly regrets that the Russian Federation refuses to grant the SMM access to the illegally annexed Crimean

Peninsula and reiterates that the Mission's mandate covers the entire territory of Ukraine in accordance with its internationally recognized borders.

The EU's position on the unjustified use of force by Russia near the Kerch Strait on 25 November 2018, its negative impact in the Black and Azov Seas and Russia's violations of international law is well-known. We once again urge Russia to comply without delay with the order of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) delivered on 25 May and to immediately release the 24 detained Ukrainian servicemen and allow them to return to Ukraine, to release and return to Ukraine's custody the vessels, and call on both parties to refrain from taking any action which might aggravate or extend the dispute. We reiterate that respect for international court rulings is fundamental for an international rules-based order.

We express our utmost concern about the Russian presidential decree of 24 April, enabling the simplified issuing of passports in certain areas of Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk regions, which runs counter to the spirit and the objectives of the Minsk agreements. We will continue to monitor the situation in eastern Ukraine and stand ready to consider further options, including non-recognition of Russian passports issued in contradiction to the Minsk agreements, in close coordination with our international partners. We call for an urgent resumption of negotiating efforts with a view to the implementation of the Minsk agreements and for measures aimed at rebuilding confidence among the parties.

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