



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1236 Vienna, 18 July 2019

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

We are encouraged by the constructive participation of both Ukraine and Russia in a meeting of political advisers in the Normandy Format in Paris on 12 July and the joint recommendation forwarded to Ambassador Sajdik. We welcome the progress achieved yesterday in the Trilateral Contact Group, including securing agreement on the ceasefire starting on 21 July. We call on the sides to implement this agreement and 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 urgently needed tangible results will materialize soon. We also welcome the agreement reached to simultaneously repair the bridge in Stanytsia Luhanska and call on the sides to open new crossing points along the contact line in order to ease the situation for civilians living in the conflict zone.

Still, Mr. Chairman, the security situation in the areas of conflict in eastern Ukraine, which is a consequence of continuous acts of aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, remains tense and volatile. The SMM continues to report about numerous ceasefire violations, presence of weapons in violation of withdrawal lines on both sides of the contact line, and constantly rising death toll. Mines and UXO are another factor posing an imminent threat not only to the civilian population, but also to SMM monitors. We once again reiterate our call to disengage, withdraw heavy weapons and step up efforts on comprehensive mine action.

The EU strongly condemns shelling of residential areas, placing military hardware near civilian infrastructure and exposing civilians to further threats. Last week the SMM reported on a woman killed in Holmivskyi due to a shrapnel injuries and another one injured by shrapnel in Olenivka. In the recent days, the SMM also observed fresh damage from shelling and gunfire to civilian properties and infrastructure, including homes, two schools, the House of Culture, a day-clinic and a power substation. We commend the efforts by the SMM to alleviate the situation of the civilians affected by the conflict by facilitating and monitoring adherence to the ceasefire to facilitate repairs and the operations of critical civilian infrastructure.

The EU welcomes reports about the improved situation in the area of Stanytsia Luhanska and ongoing demining activities after disengagement of forces and military hardware, 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 starting with the dismantlement of fortifications. At the same time, we would welcome further signs of progress towards a lasting ceasefire, including in the disengagement areas of Petrivske and Zolote. In particular, the situation inside the Zolote disengagement area, where the SMM reports about continued military activities, remains of concern.

The EU once again strongly deplures any attempts to harass, intimidate or impede in any way the work of SMM monitors by Russia-backed armed formations. We deplore that the Mission's safety and security continues to be endangered by shelling and small-arms fire in its proximity. On 5 July an SMM patrol positioned east of the Zolote disengagement area heard bullets flying over their heads ricocheting off on a hard structure behind them. The incident, posing a direct threat to the monitors, followed a similar one which occurred only a day before. We strongly urge the signatories of the Minsk agreements to ensure full safety and security of the SMM and honour their commitment to ensure rapid response to specific violations registered by the SMM.

The EU strongly condemns the increasing targeting and jamming of the SMM UAVs. We are concerned that the attempts to locate the Long Range UAV lost on 27 June in non-government controlled area were hindered by jamming and produced no results. On 12 July small-arms fire was yet again directed at an SMM mini-UAV, this

time near Metalist, in non-government controlled area 7 km north-west of Luhansk. Those responsible for any willful damage, destruction or loss of SMM UAVs and other assets should be held accountable, both politically and financially. We call on Russia to stop supplying high-tech jamming equipment to the armed formations it backs in Donbas.

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, which predominantly occur in non-government controlled areas, including in the area near the Ukrainian-Russian state border. We 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. In the context of the state border, we would like to hear the Russian Federation's explanation regarding movement of trucks near Stepne and Manych, which was recently observed by the SMM in areas where there are no official state border crossing points.

The EU supports the SMM's continued efforts to place a strong focus on the human dimension in its monitoring activities. 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. We remain concerned about the welfare of over 70 Ukrainian political prisoners currently held by Russia, particularly Pavlo Hryb and Edem Bekirov, who require urgent medical treatment. We express our utmost concern about the detention by Russian police of dozens of demonstrators who last week peacefully rallied in front of the Supreme Court in Moscow in support of Crimean Tatars to draw attention to human rights abuses in Crimea. The EU calls for the SMM to have access to the illegally annexed Crimean Peninsula in line with the Mission's mandate that 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. Respect for international court rulings is fundamental for an international rules-based order.

We reiterate 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 understand that President Putin signed yesterday another decree further expanding the scope of implementation of this decision. 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 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.