



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1268 Vienna, 21 May 2020

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

Mr Chairman, the situation in eastern Ukraine is becoming increasingly volatile. For four weeks in a row now, the SMM has recorded a rise in the number of ceasefire violations including in and around disengagement areas, and a sharp increase of civilian casualties. The SMM reported as well on more ceasefire violations attributable to mortar and artillery rounds; weapons that should have been withdrawn according to the Minsk agreements. Furthermore, it is gravely concerning that the SMM is consistently recording people inside the Zolote and Petrivske disengagement areas at night. These violations put the health and security of the local population at risk. We also note more worrying incidents such as shelling and explosions in the close vicinity of SMM patrols. For example on 15 May, when an SMM patrol was monitoring adherence to a localized ceasefire to facilitate repairs of water infrastructure in the south-western edge of Berezivske, several projectiles exploded near their position. Such acts are absolutely unacceptable as they constitute a direct risk to our Mission staff.

Mr Chairman, for weeks, we have repeatedly expressed our concern about the fact that the unhindered, unrestricted and unconditional freedom of movement of the SMM, is violated by the Russian-backed armed formations under the pretext of COVID-19 precautions. As the SMM has taken stringent precautionary measures in response to the pandemic to ensure the continued safety of all, it is gravely concerning that they still are hindered by the Russian-backed armed formations to cross into non-government controlled areas and to move along official crossing routes of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, thus impeding the Mission’s mandate. At the same time, the flow of

persons and transport across the uncontrolled segment of Ukrainian-Russian border is continuing without any major COVID-19 implications. Mr Chairman, the SMM was set up as a single, unified entity which cannot and must not be broken up into separate parts, as it was stated by Ambassador Cevik last week. Any attempt to restrict the freedom of the movement of SMM runs counter to both the Minsk Agreements and the Permanent Council's Decision No. 1117 establishing the Mission's mandate. We urge Russia to use its considerable influence over the armed formations it backs in order to meet the Minsk commitments in full and to stop this hindrance of the SMM to fulfil its mandate.

Furthermore, the current pandemic situation makes the SMM's technical assets more important than ever to ensure the Mission's ability to implement its mandate. Still, the SMM reports frequently about both signal interference as well as small arms fire against their UAV's and stationed cameras. We deplore the continued action to compromise the functioning of these assets. Those responsible for any wilful damage, destruction or loss of SMM UAVs and other assets should be held accountable, both politically and financially.

We fully support efforts of the Trilateral Contact Group and the Normandy Format in working towards a sustainable political solution to the conflict, in full respect of the sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. It is therefore important that the sides take the necessary steps to implement the agreed conclusions of the Paris N4 Summit of December in good faith. In this context, the EU commends the constructive approach displayed by Ukraine and calls on Russia to act likewise, including within the TCG.

We note that 18 May marks the 76th anniversary of the deportation of Crimean Tatars, among others, which was a tragic watershed in their history. Sadly, this community has been especially targeted by human rights violations in Crimea. We remain gravely concerned about the human rights situation in the Crimean Peninsula, illegally annexed by the Russian Federation. Over the past six years, the people living in the peninsula have been faced with severe restrictions to their fundamental freedoms. The EU calls for full compliance with international human rights standards in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. We continue to urge the

Russian Federation to ensure unimpeded access to international human rights monitoring missions and human rights non-governmental organisations to Crimea.

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 fuelling 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*, 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.