



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1230

Vienna, 30 May 2019

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

Mr. Chairman, the EU and others around this table deplore every week 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. The International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) delivered on 25 May an Order in the Case concerning the detention of three Ukrainian naval vessels following the incident of 25 November 2018. It prescribes Russia 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 calls on both parties to refrain from taking any action which might aggravate or extend the dispute. This has been also the clear position of the EU since the events last November. We have repeatedly called on Russia to release the detained crew members and the captured vessels unconditionally and without delay. We would have expected Russia to comply without delay with the order of ITLOS and we continue to do so. We deeply regret that, instead, the Moscow Court upheld last Monday the extension of the arrest of the sailors until July, thus flouting the Order of ITLOS. We reiterate that respect for international court rulings is fundamental for an international rules-based order.

Mr. Chairman, another week has passed marked by a volatile security situation in the area of the conflict, which is a consequence of acts of aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine. We deeply regret that this negative development continued to be accompanied by civilian casualties and damage.

Often, presence of military equipment near civilian infrastructure further aggravates the risks civilians along the line of contact are exposed to. This concerns in particular the Donetsk Filtration Station and Vasilyvka Pumping Station, which supply potable water to nearly half a million people, that are at high risk of substantial damage and consequently their possible closure since the forward positions of the sides are at some point only 150 metres away from each other. We stress that lasting ceasefire, withdrawal of heavy weapons, disengagement of forces and comprehensive demining are important steps toward a sustainable political solution of the conflict and urge both sides to step up efforts to this end in line with the commitments they have signed up to. We call on the Russian Federation to use its considerable influence over the armed formations to this end.

Mr. Chairman, the SMM again reported about applications for Russian citizenship in areas controlled by Russia-backed armed formations following the signature of the two decrees by the Russian President offering expedited Russian citizenship for Ukrainian citizens. This is yet another attack on Ukraine's sovereignty by Russia which underlines Russia's intention to further destabilise Ukraine and to exacerbate the conflict. We reiterate our call on Russia to refrain from applying the above mentioned decrees and any actions that undermine the implementation of the Minsk agreements, and could impede the full restoration of Ukrainian government control over its territory within its internationally recognised borders.

Mr. Chairman, any restrictions to the SMM's work, including its technical assets, are unacceptable. We condemn restrictions to the SMM's freedom of movement occurring predominantly in areas controlled by Russia-backed armed formations. We are in particular concerned over the systematic restrictions the SMM continues to experience in south Donetsk region and along the uncontrolled Ukraine-Russia state border. Such impediments prevent the SMM to provide us with an accurate picture of the situation on the ground and contravene the SMM's mandate. We repeat that the SMM must have safe, secure and unhindered access throughout Ukraine. This includes the illegally annexed Crimean peninsula and the Ukraine-Russia state border to which the SMM is systematically denied access.

We are deeply concerned that UAV flights continue to experience signal interference and the SMM continues to report about small arms fire directed at mini UAVs. This was recently the case on three occasions, all in non-government controlled areas, near Pervomaisk, Zolote-5 and Bila Kamianka. We condemn the continued targeting and jamming of the SMM's technical assets. Those responsible for any willful damage, destruction or loss of SMM UAVs and other assets should be held accountable, both politically and financially.

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.

We remain gravely concerned about the dire human rights situation on the illegally annexed Crimean peninsula. We call for full compliance with international human rights standards in the peninsula and we reiterate our call for the immediate release of all those who have been detained in the Crimean peninsula and sentenced in breach of international law. We are deeply concerned regarding the deteriorating health of Edem Bekirov. We expect him to be granted access to urgent and appropriate medical care and to be released without delay.

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 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.

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