



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1229 Vienna, 23 May 2019

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

Mr. Chairman, the EU would like to congratulate Ukraine on the inauguration of President Volodymyr Zelensky and welcome his priority for achieving peace. We remain deeply concerned about the volatile security situation in the area of the conflict, which is a consequence of acts of aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine. Civilians continue to suffer from threats to their lives and homes. We deplore the gunfire damage to civilian houses and infrastructure on both sides of the contact line as reported by the SMM, often resulting from the close proximity of positions of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and the Russia-backed armed formations, especially in the area around the Zolote disengagement area, but also in other parts near the contact line. We are alarmed by the increasing impact the ongoing shelling is having on schools. We are concerned about the long-lasting mental and physical scars especially for children and urge the sides to protect civilian infrastructure. We emphasize once more the hardship civilians, especially elderly people, are facing at the entry-exit check points while crossing the contact line. We urge the sides to take concrete actions to improve the conditions for the crossing by repairing the bridge in Stanytsia Luhanska and opening up additional crossing points.

We deplore laying of new mines as reported by the SMM posing a serious threat to the lives of the monitors and the civilian population. 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 the 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.

We are deeply concerned about the negative impact of the two decrees signed by the Russian President offering expedited Russian citizenship for Ukrainian citizens currently resident in areas of Donbas controlled by Russia-backed armed formations and to Ukrainian citizens formerly resident in the illegally annexed Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. 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.

The EU deplores any restrictions to the SMM's work and strongly condemns incidents which put the monitors at risk, such as the small arms fire close the SMM's position near non-government-controlled Molodizhne on 16 May. As reported in the SMM's weekly report of 15 May, the SMM's freedom of movement was restricted 17 times, all in areas controlled by Russia-backed armed formations. The fact that the SMM continues to face systematic restrictions in the areas of south Donetsk region and along the Ukraine-Russia state border further adds to our concerns. Mr. Chairman, 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 welcome the resumption of the SMM LR UAV flights following the loss of a Long Range UAV on 19 April. We are deeply concerned that UAV flights continue to experience signal interference since the resumption of their operation on 11 May and the SMM continues to report about small arms fire directed at mini UAVs. We condemn the continued targeting and jamming of the SMM's technical assets. Those responsible for any wilful damage, destruction or loss of SMM

UAVs and other assets should be held accountable, both politically and financially.

Our 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 reiterate our strong call on Russia to release all the crew members and return their vessels unconditionally and without delay. We expect Russia to ensure unhindered and free passage through the Kerch Strait to and from the Azov Sea, in accordance with international law. The increasing militarisation of Crimea continues to impact negatively the security situation in the Black Sea region. We encourage the SMM to continue its monitoring and reporting on the situation in the coastal area of the Sea of Azov.

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 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 NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, 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.

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