



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Permanent Council No. 1231 Vienna, 6 June 2019

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

Mr. Chairman the armed violence in eastern Ukraine continued over the past week, as reported by the SMM. This is highly disturbing given the serious negative repercussions of the conflict, which is a consequence of acts of aggression by Russia against Ukraine, on civilians. The EU strongly condemns shelling of residential areas, as well as placing military hardware near civilian infrastructure, exposing civilians to further threats as well as increasing the risk of damage to critical infrastructure. We deplore in particular the dire conditions at the Entry-Exit Checkpoints where people have to wait for hours, forced to stay overnight and even get under fire as happened recently near Mariupol. We strongly deplore laying of new mines, including anti-tank ones, as reported again by the SMM, and call on both sides to step up efforts on comprehensive mine action. We call on the Russian Federation to use its considerable influence over the armed formations it backs to this end

Last week, we bid farewell to the first SMM Chief Monitor Ambassador Apakan, praising him and the team of his monitors for their work and stressing the important contribution of the SMM in containing the conflict and providing us with situational awareness. In this context, we strongly deplore any impediments to the SMM’s work, which continued to occur predominantly in areas controlled by Russia-backed armed formations. We are deeply concerned in particular about the systematic restrictions to the SMM’s freedom of movement by Russia-backed

armed formations in areas of southern Donetsk and at the uncontrolled Ukraine-Russia state border where an SMM long-range UAV has again recently spotted trucks travelling from near the border with the Russian Federation to non-government-controlled areas of Luhansk region. Since the beginning of 2019, the SMM's freedom of movement has been restricted at checkpoints in non-government-controlled areas of southern Donetsk region over 140 times. Such restrictions create blind spots for the SMM in an attempt to hide facts on the ground and raise the question what needs to be hidden from the eyes of the international community. We condemn the continued targeting and jamming of the SMM's technical assets, in particular SMM UAVs, which occurred on both sides of the contact line over the past week. Those responsible for any wilful damage, destruction or loss of SMM UAVs and other assets should be held accountable, both politically and financially.

Mr. Chairman, the EU echoes Special Representative Ambassador Sajdik in welcoming the appointment of the former President of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma as the Head of the Ukrainian delegation in the Trilateral Contact Group. We welcome the fact that the meetings of the TCG and its working groups in Minsk have resumed quickly after the inauguration of Volodymyr Zelensky as the President of Ukraine. We express our support to the efforts within the Normandy Format and the TCG towards a sustainable political solution to the conflict in line with OSCE principles and commitments.

Mr. Chairman, 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 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.

Last year, on June 4<sup>th</sup> 2018, the journalist Roman Sushchenko was sentenced to 12 years in prison on highly questionable espionage charges. The EU expects all

illegally detained Ukrainian citizens in Russia and on the Crimean peninsula to be released unconditionally and without delay.

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.

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\*, 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.