



## EUROPEAN UNION

### **OSCE Permanent Council No. 1234 Vienna, 4 July 2019**

#### **EU statement in Response to Briefings by the Special Representative in Ukraine of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office and in the Trilateral Contact Group, Ambassador Martin Sajdik, and the Chief Monitor of the OSCE SMM, Ambassador Yaşar Halit Çevik**

Mr. Chairperson, the European Union warmly welcomes Ambassadors Martin Sajdik and Yaşar Halit Çevik to the Permanent Council. We once again congratulate Ambassador Çevik on taking up the post of Chief Monitor and wish him all the best in carrying out his duties. We thank both of you for your dedication and tireless efforts in working towards sustainable peace in Ukraine. We appreciate your comprehensive briefings.

Ambassador Sajdik, the EU reiterates its full support for the efforts of the TCG and its working groups. We commend Ukraine for bringing positive initiatives to the TCG in an attempt to reinvigorate the Minsk process. The dialogue regarding conflict resolution seems to be gaining a new momentum. We call on Russia to fully engage in the process. Russia should assume its responsibility in this regard and use its influence over the armed formations it backs to meet the Minsk commitments in full.

The EU welcomes the disengagement of forces and hardware in Stanytsia Luhanska, as observed and documented by the SMM. We call on all sides to take all necessary steps to ensure the long term sustainability of the process. We urge the Russian Federation to use its considerable influence over the armed formations it backs to this end. We are grateful to the SMM for its active involvement in facilitating the disengagement process, as well as its monitoring and verification and the thorough reporting, which we closely follow. We encourage further progress to be made

towards improving the conditions for civilians crossing the line of contact, such as urgently rebuilding the bridge at Stanytsia Luhanska and opening of new crossing points. We share Ambassador Sajdik's hope that the successful implementation of the disengagement process in Stanytsia Luhanska will serve as a catalyst for further steps towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict, starting with a sustainable and permanent ceasefire.

We call on the sides to recommit and to adhere to the so called "harvest" ceasefire. This is another opportunity for improving the dire situation on the ground and it should not be wasted. We call on the sides to show the necessary political will and to work towards a permanent and sustainable ceasefire. The EU supports any additional measures that would help to achieve this goal. Lasting ceasefire, disengagement of forces and comprehensive demining are important steps toward a sustainable political resolution of the conflict.

Regrettably, the overall security situation in eastern Ukraine remains tense and volatile. The conflict, which is a consequence of acts of aggression by Russia against Ukraine, has entered into its sixth year and the armed violence in the reported period continued unabated with a high number of ceasefire violations per day and increasing numbers of civilian and military casualties. We share your shock, Ambassador Sajdik, about the death of two Ukrainian military medics near Vodiane and the injury of two medical volunteers near Marinka this week. Those responsible must be held accountable. The sides continued to fail to fully adhere to the agreements on withdrawal of heavy weapons, which were also observed by the SMM near residential areas, posing a risk to the lives of civilians.

Hundreds of thousands of civilians continue to suffer hardship due to the armed conflict. The number of victims grows every day. The shelling and small arms fire cause damage to civilian property, schools and infrastructure on both sides of the contact line. Danger posed by mines and UXOs present close to populated areas, essential roads and in the vicinity of frequently used entry-exit checkpoints is only adding to the hardship of the local population. The EU reiterates its call on the sides to commence comprehensive demining.

Ambassador Çevik, the EU commends our monitors for their professionalism and dedication in carrying out the Mission's mandate, often in extremely challenging and hostile environment. We strongly deplore any attempts to harass, intimidate them or impede their work. Unfortunately, in the reported period restrictions and other

impediments to the SMM's monitoring persisted, mostly in non-government-controlled areas, including border areas. We deplore that the Mission's safety continues to be endangered by shelling and small-arms fire in its proximity or by threats directed at SMM members. We reiterate our call on the sides to ensure monitors' full safety and security. The EU condemns the continued targeting and jamming of the SMM's technical assets, in particular SMM UAVs. In the reporting period, interference contributed to the loss of one long-range, one mid-range and 11 mini-UAVs. Just last week the SMM lost yet another LR UAVs near Pikuzy. Those responsible for any wilful damage, destruction or loss of SMM UAVs and other assets should be held accountable, both politically and financially.

We condemn that the monitors continue to be systematically prevented from accessing certain border areas held by Russia-backed armed formations, the Crimean peninsula and coastal areas east of Mariupol. We remain deeply concerned about the vehicular activity in non-government-controlled areas near the Ukraine-Russia state border observed by the SMM. We support the intentions to open additional Forward Patrol Bases in order to strengthen SMM's footprint in the area and call for security guarantees, which would pave the way for implementing those plans.

The EU welcomes the SMM's continued efforts to monitor not only the security situation, but also respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. We reiterate our concerns about the deteriorating human rights situation on the Crimean Peninsula and urge for full compliance with international standards in this regard. The EU strongly regrets that the Russian Federation refuses to grant access to the SMM to the Crimean Peninsula in accordance with their mandate. We express concern that the Mission's ability to monitor respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in non-government-controlled areas remains limited.

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. We reiterate that respect for international court rulings is fundamental for an international rules-based order.

We express 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 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 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.

Mr. Chairman, we once again thank Ambassadors Sajdik and Çevik for their ongoing invaluable work and wish them and their teams every success.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\* and ALBANIA\*, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, 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.