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FSC.DEL/67/23/Rev.1
15 February 2023

ENGLISH
Original: FRENCH

STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN UNION AT THE 1036th MEETING OF THE OSCE FORUM FOR SECURITY CO-OPERATION

15 February 2023

On mine action

Mr. Chairperson,

The European Union and its Member States thank the speakers for their presentations on the important and highly topical subject of mines.

Today, our continent is being ravaged by a brutal war of aggression unleashed by Russia against Ukraine and supported by the Belarusian authorities. Against this backdrop, it is important to remember the human devastation and considerable security risks caused by the contamination of territories by mines, including anti-personnel landmines, booby traps, cluster munitions and all explosive remnants of war, which constitute a major threat to civilian populations. In addition, mines reduce the area available for cultivation and impact the agricultural workforce, which is highly exposed to danger; it negatively affects the economy by restricting communication and trade possibilities. As we have seen in Bosnia and Herzegovina, certain climate disasters can compound these threats several decades after the end of a conflict.

In the context of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, the indiscriminate use of cluster munitions, anti-personnel landmines and booby traps constitutes a violation of international humanitarian law, for which the perpetrators will have to answer.

At the global level, we note the growing threat both to armed forces and to humanitarian personnel, peacekeeping forces and civilian populations as a result of improvised explosive devices. These devices can have a devastating effect far beyond the battlefield in the medium and long term. Given the increasing number of casualties caused by these weapons each year, it is essential that we do not ease up on our efforts to combat them.

We regret that anti-personnel landmines are still being used in some conflicts. In the light of this vast set of challenges, all EU Member States have acceded to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention – the Ottawa Convention – and we urge those States that have not yet done so to accede to the Convention without delay or apply its provisions on an interim basis.

The European Union supports the efforts to promote the universalization and full implementation of Protocol V of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), which defines the responsibilities of States with regard to the clearance, removal and destruction of explosive remnants of war and encourages the development of co-operation and assistance in that area. It also supports the amended Protocol II of the

CCW relating to mines, booby traps and other devices. The work carried out in this area, also on improvised explosive devices, has highlighted the importance of providing a comprehensive response to the challenges posed by these devices, both in terms of the preparation, training and capacity-building of armed forces and also of awareness-raising among the civilian population, preventing the risk of diversion, and co-operation and the exchange of information.

The European Union and its Member States are among the principal donors of assistance for mine action. During the past five years, over 500 million euros have been allocated in support of mine action in more than 30 countries, including several OSCE participating States. In particular, the European Union contributes to the development of national strategies for mine clearance and victim assistance. Furthermore, earlier this month, EU High Representative Josep Borrell announced an additional 25 million euros to support demining projects in the territories liberated by Ukrainian forces.

We appreciate the OSCE's role and the work of the Conflict Prevention Centre and its field operations in supporting mine action at various levels – for example by strengthening the norms and principles of the participating States and by identifying, developing and implementing practical measures through assistance projects. Co-operation must take into account humanitarian demining as a driver of development, giving priority to community-based demining and training activities aimed at strengthening the local capacities of the affected countries. In this regard, the European Union supports and encourages any OSCE project in Ukraine that will reduce the threat to the population, and deplores the fact that the continuation of the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine is hampering demining activities.

In addition, the European Union calls for women to be given a greater role in efforts to address explosive remnants of war. Increasing women's participation in mine clearance activities, and the involvement of women in risk education programmes, can improve the effectiveness and efficiency of these activities and achieve better results in the long term.

Mr. Chairperson,

We thank you for having provided us with an opportunity to discuss this important topic. We hope that this Security Dialogue will make it possible to maintain a momentum of co-operation consistent with the challenges confronting us, more especially so as to protect civilian populations from the dangers caused by mines, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices during and after conflicts.

Thank you.

The candidate countries the Republic of North Macedonia¹, Montenegro¹, Albania¹, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Bosnia and Herzegovina¹, the potential candidate country Georgia, the European Free Trade Association countries and members of the European Economic Area Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, as well as Andorra and San Marino, align themselves with this statement.

¹ The Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.