



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation N°967 Vienna, 03 February 2021

EU Statement on the security situation in and around Ukraine

Madam Chair, the European Union and its Member States welcome the fact that the ceasefire in the conflict zone continues to largely hold. At the same time, we are deeply concerned about sudden spikes in violence observed by the SMM in recent weeks. On January 28, the Mission recorded 474 ceasefire violations over just one day, sadly a new record high since the July measures took effect. It is imperative to exercise maximum restraint and refrain from actions that could jeopardise the current calm.

In this context, the importance of establishing a functioning mechanism for investigating ceasefire violations cannot be overstated. A first positive step would be Russia's return to the Joint Control and Coordination Commission without undue delay and we call on Russia to do so. The July ceasefire brought a tangible improvement in the lives of thousands of people across the contact line. It is vital to find the political will to adopt further measures that go in the same direction.

We reiterate our strong support to the Swedish OSCE CiO for her work towards a sustainable resolution of the conflict and welcome her visits to the region. The EU fully supports the Trilateral Contact Group and the Normandy Format with a view to the implementation of the Minsk agreements, in full respect of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We recall that a number of commitments are still outstanding and call on the sides to implement them without undue delay. In this context, we commend Ukraine for the steps taken to open the Shchastia and

Zolote EECs and its willingness to move ahead with the adoption of the updated de-mining plan.

Madam Chair, we deplore any attempts to harass, intimidate or impede the work of the SMM personnel and condemn the systematic restrictions imposed on the Mission's freedom of movement, occurring predominantly in non-governmental-controlled areas. The SMM must have safe, secure, unconditional and unimpeded access to the entire territory of Ukraine, including Crimea and the areas along the Ukrainian-Russian State border, in accordance with its mandate. Last week, SMM UAVs were again the target of small-arms fire and signal interference. This practice must stop. Those responsible for any wilful damage, destruction or loss of SMM assets should be held accountable, both politically and financially.

Madame Chair, the European Union and its Member States continue to follow closely the worrying developments in Crimea, which is part of Ukraine. We express our deep concern about the ongoing large-scale militarisation of the Crimean peninsula by Russia, which continues to impact the security situation in the Black Sea region and beyond. The illegal drafting of local residents into Russia's armed forces also continues at an alarming rate. More than twenty eight thousand Crimean citizens have been forcibly conscripted since 2014, of which over six thousand were conscripted last year alone. Those who try to evade conscription face criminal prosecution: eighty one such cases were opened by Russian occupational authorities last year. This is deplorable and a clear violation of international humanitarian law, which also Russia is bound by.

In conclusion, we remain firm in our 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. Respect for these principles and commitments must be restored. We underline Russia's responsibility in this regard and once again call on Russia to use its considerable influence over the armed formations it backs to meet these commitments in full. We reiterate our deep concern about the presence of military equipment and personnel from Russia in the conflict zone. We call on Russia to immediately stop providing financial and military support to the armed formations.

The ceasefire must be respected. All Minsk-regulated weapons must be withdrawn. All foreign armed formations, military equipment and mercenaries must be removed from Ukraine. Re-establishing full Ukrainian control over its state border is essential.

We recall our unwavering support to the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders and call upon Russia to do likewise. We urge Russia to recognise 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. We continue to call on Russia to ensure unhindered and free passage to and from the Sea of Azov in accordance with international law.

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 UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA, ANDORRA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

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