



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation N°977 Vienna, 26 May 2021

EU Statement on the security situation in and around Ukraine

Mr. Chair, the EU and its Member States remain concerned about the recent heightened tensions resulting from Russia's unusual military activities at the eastern border of Ukraine and in illegally annexed Crimea. While we took positive note of the announcement of the withdrawal of some Russian troops, we urge the Russian Federation to show much needed transparency in order to dispel tensions, including by providing information to this Forum on the process of withdrawal and on the remaining forces and equipment which appear to be substantial. We recall that transparency in the field of military activities is one of the main commitments to which all OSCE participating States have signed up to.

We regret that the security situation in the conflict zone does not show any sign of improvement. The SMM continues to face significant obstructions on its freedom of movement and its UAVs continue to be targeted by small arms fire and frequent signal interference. It is also concerning that the SMM recorded "increased kinetic activity" inside and near the disengagement areas of Zolote and Petrivske. Last week the SMM reported a persistently high-level of ceasefire violations, corroborated five civilian casualties, including one fatality and reported further damages to civilian properties. Overall, this year, the Mission has confirmed 24 civilian casualties, nine killed and 15 injured, of which 15 cases were due to mines, unexploded ordnance and other explosive objects.

In light of such tragic facts and the continuing dire humanitarian situation, we again call for progress on the negotiating path to a sustainable solution to the conflict, in full respect of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The EU and its Member States fully support international diplomatic efforts in this regard and call on Russia as a signatory of the Minsk agreements and a party to both the Trilateral Contact Group and the Normandy format to acknowledge its role and to engage constructively in these negotiations.

We deplore and decisively reject the distorted narrative of the conflict that Russia tries to advance here in this Forum and elsewhere, presenting it as an internal Ukrainian conflict and Russia as a mere mediator. We also reject insinuations about the alleged "responsibility of the West" for this conflict and its victims. We underline that attempts to change international borders by force, in clear violation of international law, and principles and commitments of this organisation, are unacceptable. Such attempts were at the origin of this conflict which has already cost about 14 000 human lives.

As to military cooperation that many EU Member States conduct with Ukraine, we recall the long-established principle, in international law and also here in the OSCE, that all States have the inherent right to freely choose the course of their foreign and security policy. The political and security cooperation between sovereign States is a normal practice, in particular when it is conducted in a transparent way and with the consent of all States involved.

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. We express our deep concern about Russia's actions to block access to parts of the Black Sea, including near illegally-annexed Crimea and the Kerch Strait, and 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 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.

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