



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation N°968 Vienna, 17 February 2021

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#### **EU Statement on the security situation in and around Ukraine**

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Madam Chair, sadly we will soon mark the seventh anniversary of this conflict that was caused by a blatant violation of international law by the Russian Federation, and has, until now, cost more than 13.000 lives. The European Union and its Member States firmly believe that this conflict, which is not an internal one, urgently needs a political solution. We fully support the Minsk agreements that, to recall, consist of the 5th September 2014 Minsk Protocol, the 19th September 2014 Minsk Memorandum and the 12th February 2015 Minsk Package of Measures, and call for their implementation. We equally support the work of both the Normandy Format and the Trilateral Contact Group in facilitating the peaceful settlement of the conflict.

We commend our two EU MS France and Germany for their mediating role in the Normandy format, and the OSCE for its mediation efforts within the Trilateral Contact Group. The CiO's Special Representative Amb. Heidi Grau, Chief Monitor Amb. Yaşar Halit Çevik as well as all the coordinators of the Working Groups within the TCG have our full support. Unfortunately, their relentless efforts are still hampered, while only a sincere political will to implement the Minsk agreements in good faith could help move forward towards a peaceful solution. In this context, we call on Russia, as party to both of these formats, to show a constructive approach in these negotiations and in the implementation of all the respective provisions it committed to, including the still outstanding commitments of the 2019 Normandy Summit.

Political will remains key, as we have seen in July last year when the re-commitment to the ceasefire was agreed, allowing substantial improvement to the security situation and reducing the resulting casualties, in particular among the civilian population. However, the recent trend is worrying. The number of ceasefire violations in the respective SMM reports is increasing. The strengthened ceasefire is an important achievement that must be preserved. We commend Ukraine for its restraint in responding to military provocations by the Russia-backed armed formations, despite the regretful and unacceptable death toll among its military personnel. Only last week five Ukrainian soldiers were killed due to sniper fire and explosions.

We reaffirm our strong support to the SMM and reiterate our commitment to back the Mission in every possible way, allowing it to continue to implement its mandate effectively. The SMM must have safe, secure, unconditional and unimpeded access to the entire territory of Ukraine, with a view to the implementation of its mandate to its full extent. This includes the illegally annexed Crimea and the city of Sevastopol and along the whole Ukraine-Russia state border. We strongly deplore any attempts to harass, intimidate or impede the work of the SMM and its monitors and condemn the continued restrictions, which occur overwhelmingly in non-government-controlled areas. In the weekly report issued last Wednesday the SMM informed about 13 cases of denials of access, with all but one imposed by the Russia-backed armed formations. We recall our position that any impediments to the SMM's work, including attempts to destroy the SMM's assets, are unacceptable. Those responsible for any wilful damage, destruction or loss of SMM UAVs and other assets should be held accountable, both politically and financially.

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 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.

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