



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1260 Vienna, 27 February 2020

EU Statement on “Russia’s Ongoing Aggression against Ukraine and Illegal Occupation of Crimea”

The conflict in eastern Ukraine and the illegal annexation of the Crimean peninsula remain a bleeding wound on the European continent with a significant human toll, still rising every week. The urgent need to find an end to this conflict is obvious. In this context, we underline the importance of keeping this conflict high on the radar of the international community, in particular the United Nations, as it was the case last week in New York. The European Union reiterates its full support to the international diplomatic efforts within the Normandy process and the Trilateral Contact Group.

Regrettably, the sixth anniversary of the start of the conflict in eastern Ukraine and of the illegal annexation of the Crimean peninsula was marked by a dangerous military escalation near Zolote on 18 February, as confirmed by the SMM in its reports. We were deeply saddened by the reports on casualties. We strongly deplore such military escalation and offensive attempts, as they demonstrate a lack of commitment to implement the Minsk agreements and the measures agreed at the Normandy Summit in December. We urge the sides to fully respect their reiterated commitments; in particular, we call on Russia to exert its considerable influence over the armed formations it backs to ensure that the ceasefire is fully implemented. In this context, we reiterate our call on Russia to return to the Joint Centre for Control and Coordination, which could be an added capability for the implementation of the Minsk agreements.

We reiterate the importance of fully implementing the commitments of the Minsk agreements, including those undertaken at the Normandy Four Summit on 9 December, in good faith. Compliance with previous agreements is a prerequisite for building confidence and taking further steps. In this context, the EU commends the constructive approach displayed by Ukraine and calls on Russia to act likewise.

We hope for progress on the disengagement areas in the near future. They are important confidence-building measures, albeit not a replacement for the full and comprehensive ceasefire. We are concerned by SMM reports on ceasefire violations inside the disengagement area of Petrivske and in close vicinity to the other existing disengagement areas, and by the continued presence of members of armed formations wearing JCCC armbands without being entitled to, which constitutes a violation of the TCG agreement on disengagement of September 2016.

Mr. Chairperson, the SMM remains our most reliable source of information about the situation on the ground. We highly value its regular and thematic reports. We reiterate our commitment to back the Mission in every possible way, including financially and by providing qualified staff and appropriate equipment. We take note of the budget proposal submitted this week. We call on all participating States to engage constructively, with a view to ensuring appropriate financing of the mission.

The safety and security of the SMM is of primary importance. The EU strongly deplores any attempts to harass, intimidate or impede the work of SMM personnel and condemns the continued threats and restrictions to the SMM, which occur predominantly in non-government controlled areas. This practice hampers the SMM in fulfilling its mandate. The SMM must have safe, secure, unconditional and unimpeded access to the entire territory of Ukraine in order to fully implement its mandate. This includes access to the illegally annexed Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol and the area along the Ukraine-Russia state border, to which the SMM is systematically denied access by Russia-backed formations. We strongly condemn actions which jeopardise the security of SMM monitors. We also deplore the targeting of SMM assets, including SMM UAVs, by means of signal interference and small arms fire occurring almost on a daily basis in non-government controlled areas. Those responsible for any wilful damage, destruction or loss of SMM UAVs and other assets should be held accountable, both politically and financially.

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 EU welcomes Ukraine's efforts to continue to seek justice using international legal instruments and courts. We underline in this regard the importance of respect for judicial decisions and their timely implementation.

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 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.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, and the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, 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, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.