



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation N°915 Vienna, 15 May 2019

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#### EU Statement on the Security Situation in and around Ukraine

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Mr. Chairman, since our last discussion in this Forum on the conflict, which is a consequence of acts of aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, the situation on the ground has further deteriorated. Civilians continue to suffer from the volatile security situation posing a serious threat to their lives and damage to their homes and critical infrastructure. In this context the EU and its Member States deeply regret that the sides could not reach consensus in the TCG on the recommitment to ceasefire on the occasion of the Easter festivities. Lasting ceasefire, disengagement of forces and comprehensive demining are important steps toward a peaceful resolution of the conflict. We regret any statement supporting military actions contravening the Minsk agreements.

The danger mines pose to the lives of civilians as well as our monitors was brought to our attention once more while remembering the tragic death of the SMM medic Joseph Stone killed two years ago in an explosion caused most likely by an anti-tank mine. We urge the sides to fully comply with their commitments to remove mines and to stop laying new ones.

Mr. Chairman, any impediment to the SMM's work, which continued predominantly in areas controlled by Russia-backed armed formations, is unacceptable. We are deeply concerned in particular about the systematic restrictions to the SMM's freedom of movement by Russia-backed armed formations in areas of southern Donetsk and at the uncontrolled Ukraine-Russia state border. Such restrictions create blind spots for the SMM in an attempt to hide facts on the ground. We condemn the continued targeting and jamming of the SMM's technical assets. We are concerned about the

losses of 3 LR UAVs since October 2018. Those responsible for any wilful damage, destruction or loss of SMM UAVs and other assets should be held accountable, both politically and financially.

Mr. Chairperson, the decrees signed by the Russian President on 24 April and on 1 May offering expedited Russian citizenship for Ukrainian citizens currently resident in areas of Donbas controlled by Russia-backed armed formations and to Ukrainian citizens formerly resident in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol are a worrying development and yet another attack on Ukraine's sovereignty by Russia. The timing of the decrees released immediately after Ukraine's Presidential election, which demonstrated Ukraine's strong attachment to democracy and the rule of law, underlines Russia's intention to further destabilise Ukraine and to exacerbate the conflict rather than engage in constructive dialogue with the Ukrainian authorities. The EU calls on Russia to refrain from any actions that undermine the implementation of the Minsk agreements, and could impede the full restoration of Ukrainian government control over its territory within its internationally recognized borders.

Our position on the unjustified use of force by Russia at the Kerch Strait on 25 November 2018 and its negative impact in the Black and Azov Seas and Russia's violations of international law is well known. We strongly call on Russia to release the crew members and return their vessels unconditionally and without delay. We expect Russia to ensure unhindered and free passage through the Kerch Strait to and from the Azov Sea, in accordance with international law. The increasing militarization of Crimea continues to impact negatively the security situation in the Black Sea region.

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 regarding information 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 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.

NORTH MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\*, and ALBANIA\*, the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA, ANDORRA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

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