



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation N°910 Vienna, 13 March 2019

EU Statement on the Security Situation in and around Ukraine

Mr. Chairman, at our last meeting two weeks ago, the EU and its Member States as well as other delegations expressed their deep concern over the continuing impediments to the SMM's work occurring mostly in areas held by Russia-backed armed formations. Such restrictions often put the lives of our monitors at risk, and have a negative impact on the operational effectiveness of the Mission. Sadly, this alarming trend continued over the past two weeks, and the majority of such impediments to the SMM's freedom of movement was again registered in areas held by Russia-backed armed formations. For instance, on 3 March in non-government controlled Pikuzy, the SMM was not only denied access but also verbally threatened by members of the armed formations. We repeat that this is unacceptable; the SMM must have full, safe and unhindered access throughout Ukraine, including along the Ukraine-Russia state border and the Crimean peninsula. We strongly condemn any attempts to restrict the SMM's freedom of movement or impede the fulfilment of its mandate.

In this context, we are concerned by the systematic denials of access by armed formation in parts of Southern Donetsk region and to border areas, as mentioned in the latest SMM thematic report. This trend continued over the past two weeks. As stated in the SMM weekly report of 6 March, due to restrictions of its freedom of movement at border crossing points near the Russian Federation, the SMM was only able to conduct limited monitoring there. These systematic denials of access raise profound suspicions about what is being hidden from the SMM. Combined with the refusal of those in control of these areas to provide security assurances that would enable the SMM to open a patrol hub and forward patrol locations in towns near these border areas renders the Mission's observation in border areas partial and ineffective.

We repeat our strong condemnation of any actions that put our monitors at risk. In this context we once again reiterate our call on Russia to return to the JCCC, from which it withdrew on 18 December 2017, and to restore its functionality. The JCCC in

its original set-up played an important role in securing the safety of SMM monitors and contributing to immediate resolution of impediments encountered by SMM patrols.

Mr. Chairman, we deeply regret the negative impact of the conflict on the lives of civilians living in the vicinity of the contact line. We are extremely saddened by the reports about civilian injuries caused by shelling or detonation of explosive devices. We once again reiterate our call on all sides to disengage, withdraw heavy weapons and step up efforts on comprehensive mine action, in order to ensure a comprehensive and lasting ceasefire as an important step toward a sustainable political solution in line with OSCE principles and commitments.

In this context, we welcome the recommitment to the ceasefire made by the TCG which came into effect on 8 March on the occasion of the International Women's Day. We expect the Russian Federation and Ukraine to give their full support to the recommitment to the ceasefire which should be implemented in a sustainable and comprehensive way.

Our position on the incident at the Kerch Strait on 25 November 2018 and its negative impact in the Azov Sea and Russia's violations of international law is well known. Russia's aggressive actions also affect the security situation in the entire Black Sea region. 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.

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.

The Candidate Countries 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.

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