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**STATEMENT BY
THE EUROPEAN UNION AT THE 1045th MEETING OF THE
OSCE FORUM FOR SECURITY CO-OPERATION**

17 May 2023

On capacity development in humanitarian mine action

Madam Chairperson,

The European Union and its Member States thank the speakers for their presentations on the critical and particularly relevant topic of mines, booby traps and explosive remnants of war.

Our continent is currently being ravaged by a brutal, unprovoked and illegal war of aggression unleashed by Russia against Ukraine and supported by the Belarusian regime. Against this backdrop, it is important to remember the human devastation and tremendous security risks caused by the contamination of territories by such devices, which constitute a major threat to civilian populations. In addition, contamination by mines reduces the area available for cultivation and impacts on agricultural workers, who are highly vulnerable to this threat; it acts as a brake on the economy by restricting opportunities for communication and trade.

In the context of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, the indiscriminate use of anti-personnel mines and booby traps amounts to a violation of international humanitarian law, for which the perpetrators will have to answer. More than 30 per cent of Ukrainian territory, twice the land area of Austria, is currently contaminated by mines solely on account of the Russian war of aggression. The mine-clearance process alone will take decades, as is already the case in the Western Balkan States. We strongly condemn in this regard the Russian shelling that, on 6 May, caused the death of six Ukrainians who had been taking part in a demining operation in the Kherson region. As estimated by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), from 24 February 2022 to 7 May 2023 there were 821 verified cases of civilian casualties in Ukraine, including 271 killed, as a result of mines and explosive remnants of war. That being said, the OHCHR recognizes that the actual figures must have been considerably higher. Moreover, we emphasize how children are particularly vulnerable. According to a recent report, one in eight civilians killed or injured in Ukraine by landmines and unexploded ordnance is a child.

At the global level, we note the growing threat posed by improvised explosive devices both to armed forces personnel and to humanitarian personnel, peacekeeping forces and civilian populations. These devices can have devastating medium- and long-term effects well beyond the battlefield. Given the growing number of casualties caused by these weapons every year, it is essential that we do not slacken in our efforts to combat them.

We deplore the fact that certain States, including OSCE participating States, persist in using anti-personnel mines. In the face of these challenges, all Member States of the European Union have joined the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention – the Ottawa Convention – and we urge those States that have not yet done so to accede to the Convention without delay or to apply its provisions on an interim basis, as several of our international partners have been doing.

The European Union supports the efforts to promote the universalization and full implementation of Amended Protocol II of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), on the use of mines, booby traps and other devices. It likewise supports Protocol V of the CCW, which defines the responsibilities of States with regard to the clearance, removal and destruction of explosive remnants of war and promotes the development of co-operation and assistance in that area.

The European Union and its Member States are among the principal donors of assistance for mine action. During the past five years, over 500 million euros have been allocated in support of mine action in more than 30 countries, including several OSCE participating States. The European Union and its Member States are contributing to the development of national strategies for mine clearance and victim assistance. The European Union is providing 43 million euros to support humanitarian mine action in Ukraine. This includes 25 million euros for demining projects in the liberated territories, as announced by EU High Representative Josep Borrell in February. Furthermore, dozens of sea mines have been destroyed in the Black Sea since the start of the war in Ukraine through coastal States' efforts. The European Union and its Member States are also active in the various aspects of humanitarian demining: the supply of equipment, the training of Ukrainian mine-clearing personnel, the on-site deployment of experts and the funding of non-governmental organizations on the ground.

We appreciate the OSCE's role and the work of the Conflict Prevention Centre, along with that of the OSCE's field operations, in supporting mine action at various levels – for example, by strengthening participating States' norms and principles and by identifying, developing and implementing practical measures through assistance projects. Co-operation must take humanitarian demining into account as a driver of development, giving priority to community-based demining and training activities aimed at strengthening local capacities in affected countries. Mine-clearance activities, which entail very long-term work, are part of efforts to achieve peace and lasting stability; they must also be accompanied by the provision of support for victims.

In that regard, the European Union is financially supporting and promoting the implementation of the OSCE Support Programme for Ukraine in the area of capacity-building for humanitarian demining – a project that will focus mainly on the economic and environmental issues arising from contamination by mines.

Furthermore, the European Union calls for the role of women in efforts to address explosive remnants of war to be strengthened. Increasing women's participation in mine-clearance activities, but also their involvement in risk education programmes, helps to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of these activities and to achieve better results in the long run.

Madam Chairperson, we thank you for having provided us with an opportunity for exchanges on this important topic. We hope that this Security Dialogue will make it possible to maintain a momentum of co-operation commensurate with the challenges facing us, in particular with a view to protecting civilian populations from the dangers presented by mines, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices during and after conflicts.

Thank you.

The candidate countries North Macedonia¹, Montenegro¹, Albania¹, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Bosnia and Herzegovina¹, the potential candidate country Georgia, the European Free Trade Association countries and members of the European Economic Area Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, as well as Andorra and San Marino, align themselves with this statement.

1 North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.