



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1289 Vienna, 12 November 2020

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

Mr Chairperson, it is six and a half years since the illegal annexation of the Crimean peninsula by Russia and the onset of acts of aggression by the Russia-backed armed formation in eastern Ukraine. The people of Ukraine continue to bear the brunt of the conflict. In this regard, the European Union notes that the latest thematic report from the SMM, which focuses on civilian casualties, regrettably informs about a figure of nearly 950 civilian casualties since 2017, including 161 deaths and 100 children casualties. Even now, after the ceasefire has been in place for more than three months, civilians are still adversely impacted by the conflict and its associated remnants of war such as mines, UXOs and other explosives. For example, last week, the SMM reported four new civilian casualties, among them a fatality, where three of them were due to grenade explosions. We deeply regret the heavy toll that the conflict is taking on civilians.

We welcome the fact that Ukraine has reopened the existing entry and exit crossing points as well as two additional crossing points at Zolote and Schastia. At the same time, we regret that the Russia-backed armed formations are withholding their opening decision on both the existing crossing points as well as for the additional ones. This has meant that civilians are being blocked on the non-government controlled side in Zolote and Schastia. We insist that safe passage through these crossing points should be ensured in compliance with the agreements made at the Trilateral Contact Group. Closed crossing points mean severe difficulties for the local

population in returning to their homes, receiving medical treatment or their pension payments. We call for the removal of obstacles that further deepen the gap between the government and non-government controlled areas.

We highly welcome the three and half months of relative calm in the conflict zone since the ceasefire was introduced. We reiterate our call on the sides to fully respect the ceasefire and refrain from actions that would jeopardise it. We strongly condemn the incidents in the recent weeks which saw casualties and even fatalities among military personnel. This was a sad reminder of the cost of ceasefire violations. We note with concern the SMM's reports on new trenches and the extension of existing trenches in the conflict areas by the sides which constitute a clear violation of the agreed additional measures. We call on the sides to stop these activities.

We urge the sides to do their utmost within the Trilateral Contact Group in order to advance on a political resolution of the conflict in full respect for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. We commend Ukraine for its constructive approach and call on Russia to display a similar attitude, which would allow substantial discussions to resume. We urge the sides to consider demining as a humanitarian issue rather than a political one, and to finalise an updated demining plan.

We welcome the visit last week of ICRC President Peter Maurer to Ukraine and hope that this visit will lead to progress on the exchange of detainees and to access of humanitarian aid mechanisms to the non-government-controlled areas, in accordance with international law.

In the SMM thematic report "Restrictions to the SMM's Freedom of Movement", released this week, it was stated that the SMM's freedom of movement is still heavily restricted, with 96% of the restrictions happening in the non-government controlled areas including those adjacent to the Ukraine-Russia state border and in the southern part of the non-government controlled Donetsk region. This is despite the fact that the Mission's mandate covers the whole territory of Ukraine. We urge Russia to use its considerable influence over the armed formations it backs to ensure that all undue restrictions on the SMM are removed and that the Mission is no longer obliged to act as three separate entities.

The EU condemns the simplified and selective procedure to obtain Russian citizenship in the non-government controlled areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions as well as forced passportization. According to information issued by the so-called “authorities” of these Ukrainian regions, over 320,000 residents have become holders of Russian passports in a simplified and selective manner. Recently, this process was made even easier. Such regulations aim at distancing the local population from government-controlled Ukraine and are a violation of international law.

The EU is deeply concerned about the sentencing of three Crimean Tatars, Rustem Emiruseinov, Arsen Abkhairov and Eskender Abdulganiev, to prison by a court in the Russian Federation for unsubstantiated “terrorism” offences. This is another example how anti-extremism laws are used in the Crimean peninsula to stifle opposition to the regime and Crimean Tatars are disproportionately affected. We urge Russia to respect its human rights commitments and to allow full, free and unrestricted access for international human rights actors to the peninsula.

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 the 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 fueling 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 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 UKRAINE and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

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