



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1311 Vienna, 29 April 2021

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

The European Union is deeply concerned about last month’s escalatory actions by the Russian Federation, including the unusual military build-up in the areas adjacent to the state border of Ukraine and in the illegally-annexed Crimean peninsula. While we take note of Russia’s announcement to withdraw troops from the Russia-Ukraine state border, as a first step in the right direction, we will continue to monitor the situation on the ground very closely. In this context, we urge Russia to engage in the recommendations put forward by participating States at the joint PC-FSC meeting of 14 April.

We are also deeply concerned about Russia’s announced closure of certain parts of the Black Sea until October 2021, which would be another provocative move violating the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. We recall that the freedom of navigation is guaranteed by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. We call on Russia to ensure unhindered and free passage to and from the Sea of Azov in accordance with international law. This closure, together with the continued militarisation of the illegally-annexed Crimean peninsula, has the potential to destabilise the security situation, not only in Ukraine, but also in the broader Black Sea region and beyond.

The repeated spikes of ceasefire violations, a trend that has been accelerating in recent weeks, is deeply concerning, even though the actual number of violations remains well below last year’s level. We are also worried by the fact that there are

newly created trenches and forward positions recorded by the SMM as well as more weapons in violation of the withdrawal lines as set out in the Minsk agreements, predominantly in the non-government controlled areas.

The unprecedented restrictions that the SMM is facing on its freedom of movement is also deeply worrying as it affects the SMM's ability to fulfil its mandate. The SMM is being denied access on an almost daily basis by the Russia-backed armed formations in the non-government controlled areas. In addition, the greatly increased frequency of interference with the SMM technological equipment is a major cause of concern. During recent weeks, the SMM UAVs have consistently been subjected to jamming and interference, making take-off and landing dangerous. We urge Russia to use its considerable influence over the armed formations it backs in order to make sure that all restrictions on the SMM's freedom of movement are removed and that the SMM and its assets can have safe and secure access to the entire territory of Ukraine, including Crimea.

We regret that Ambassador Heidi Grau had to report last week that the consistent focus of some participants on procedural matters, instead of substance, has paralysed the Trilateral Contact Group. We agree with Ambassador Grau that paying lip service to the Minsk agreements is not enough. We would in particular like to see progress regarding humanitarian issues, as the civilians' freedom of movement has been severely constrained for over a year due to the restrictions in crossing the contact line. Hundreds of thousands of civilians are separated from family members and cut off from their livelihood, pensions, medical care and other services. We urge the Russian Federation to implement the Normandy Summit commitments and to use its influence over the armed formations it backs to ensure the opening of the Shchastia and Zolote crossing points, as well as all currently closed crossing points, without further delay.

We are deeply concerned that Russia is continuing, and lately even stepping up, its policy of issuing passports in a simplified and selective manner, on a massive scale, to Ukrainian citizens of the non-government areas of Ukraine. This policy contradicts the spirit and the objectives of the Minsk agreements and constitutes a clear violation of Ukraine's sovereignty. It is even more disturbing in view of the statements attributed to high-level Russian officials evoking possible Russian military action as an alleged need to protect the interests of these newly passportized citizens. The EU and its Member States recall they do not recognize these passports and call on other OSCE participating States to act likewise.

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 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 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, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

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