



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1312 Vienna, 6 May 2021

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

It has now been over seven years since the start of Russia’s acts of aggression in eastern Ukraine and its illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, which continues to represent a major threat to the European security order. This is why the European Union is continuing to monitor the current situation in Ukraine and Russia’s actions near Ukraine’s borders and in the Crimean peninsula with increasing concern. Russia’s recent announcement to withdraw troops at the border with Ukraine was a first step in the right direction, but it needs to be followed by further concrete action on the ground, including the withdrawal of equipment. In this context, we once again urge Russia to follow up on the recommendations put forward by participating States at the joint PC-FSC meeting of 14 April.

We are deeply concerned about the unprecedented increase in restrictions on the SMM’s freedom of movement, predominantly in the non-government controlled areas, as they have a serious negative impact on the overall monitoring capacity of the Mission. In the last two weeks, the SMM issued four spot reports, all related to such restrictions. The SMM’s UAVs are also constantly subjected to jamming and interference, making their take-off and landing dangerous. On 23 April, a long-range UAV was damaged during an emergency landing due to a strong signal interference, in similar circumstances to the crash of another UAV on 7 March. Small- and middle range UAV’s are also regularly subjected to small-arms fire. These interferences and attacks are absolutely unacceptable. We reiterate that those responsible for any wilful damage, destruction or loss of SMM UAVs and other assets should be held accountable, both politically and financially.

The SMM is also reporting increased impediments to their monitoring in the non-government controlled areas and especially in the areas close to the Ukraine-Russia state border. We receive frequent spot reports on how the Russia-backed armed formations are denying the SMM passage at the checkpoints near Olenivka and Oleksandrivka. Lately, SMM patrols have also been required by the Russia-backed armed formations to fill in and sign so-called “customs declarations” to be allowed to cross the contact line. As agreed by all 57 participating States, the SMM should have safe and secure access to the entire territory of Ukraine. This includes Crimea. We strongly urge Russia to use its considerable influence over the armed formations it backs to ensure that the SMM can operate in line with its mandate.

The additional measures to strengthen the ceasefire agreed last July have allowed for a period of relative calm. The price of the recent serious deterioration of the security situation along the contact line is high, with lost lives and injuries of both military personnel and civilians in the conflict zone. We therefore urge the sides to adhere to the ceasefire and to reach an agreement on the 19 de-mining zones which is still being blocked in the TCG, despite Ukraine’s readiness to start immediate implementation.

We reiterate our strong support for the Minsk agreements and the efforts of both the Normandy Format and the Trilateral Contact Group to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict, in full respect of Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. We regret that the lack of political will from one participant continues to prevent any meaningful discussions. We call on Russia, as party to both of these formats, to show a constructive approach and to implement all the respective provisions it has committed to.

We continue to be concerned about the situation in the illegally-annexed Crimean peninsula, particularly about the ongoing human rights violations. As we mark World Press Freedom Day, we strongly deplore the persistent attacks against freedom of expression and media freedom in the illegally annexed Crimean peninsula including the shutting down of broadcasting outlets. We urge Russia to immediately release all journalists illegally detained, including Vladislav Yesipenko as well as Osman Arifmemetov, Marlen Asanov, Remzi Bekirov, Timur Ibragimov, Server Mustafayev, Seyran Saliev, Amet Suleymanov, Ruslan Suleymanov and Rustem Sheikhaliev.

We also deplore the continued militarisation of the Crimean peninsula. Russia’s announced closure of certain parts of the Black Sea until October 2021 would be

another violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. 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 Black Sea region and beyond.

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.