



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1276 Vienna, 23 July 2020

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

The European Union remains deeply concerned over the worsening security situation in eastern Ukraine. We are currently observing significant increases in ceasefire violations, including more explosions, resulting in twenty-four Ukrainian servicemen wounded only last week - almost tripling the previous week’s numbers of the wounded. Five soldiers were killed in action, including a medical doctor. Also, the security situation for the SMM is still unacceptable, with explosions in the close vicinity of SMM patrols, as described in Spot Report 38/2020. We call upon Russia to use its considerable influence over the armed formations it backs for an immediate de-escalation.

The EU welcomes the news about some further positive developments in the Trilateral Contact Group, in particular the agreement reached on additional measures to strengthen the ceasefire, which are to come into force on 27 July. We remain firm in our support for the work of the TCG and the Normandy format and commend Ukraine for its constructive approach and political will to negotiate an end to this conflict. We urge the Russian Federation to live up to its responsibility as a signatory of the Minsk agreements by implementing its provisions and by acting constructively within the Normandy Format and the Trilateral Contact group in order to create necessary security environment that would allow to achieve a sustainable political settlement of the conflict.

We note with concern that the Russia-backed armed formations continue to restrict the opening of the entry-and-exit check points (EECPs) along the contact line. Only the EECP's in Stanytsia Luhanska and Novotroitske can be considered as partially open. These restrictions contribute to exacerbating the hardship of the already severely hit conflict-affected local population. Nonetheless, we take positive note of the fact that a number of SMM staff members were allowed to cross the contact line last week to join the SMM teams in the non-government controlled areas, after obtaining a medical certificate issued by the SMM. We urge Russia to use its considerable influence over the armed formations it backs to make sure that all remaining undue restrictions of the SMM are lifted immediately.

We recall that ensuring the safety and security of Mission staff and assets is the responsibility of all participating States and those responsible for any wilful damage, destruction or loss of SMM assets should be held accountable, both politically and financially. We look forward to having the results of a thorough investigation of all such incidents reported to the Permanent Council.

The EU thanks the SMM for its thematic report on *The Impact of the Conflict on Educational Facilities and Children's Access to Education in eastern Ukraine*. It is disheartening to read that for children living near the contact line, access to education continues to be hampered by security risks posed by shelling, the prevalence of mines and unexploded ordnance near schools or on their commute to school, as well as the fact that school buildings have been rendered structurally unsafe by shelling and small arms fire. Since 2015, the SMM has reported nine civilian casualties in the immediate vicinity of educational facilities and five civilian casualties caused by unexploded ordnance or unspent ammunition at educational facilities. The Mission has confirmed damage to 93 educational facilities in 43 settlements on both sides of the contact line between January 2015 and March 2020. These ongoing ceasefire violations are threatening the physical and psychological well-being of children and educators. The European Union calls for the sides to implement a full and comprehensive ceasefire in order to re-establish a safe education environment for these children and their educators.

The European Union continues to stand in full solidarity with Ukraine and its people in fighting the Covid-19 pandemic which is hitting the conflict affected population

hardest. This is why the EU recently signed three financing agreements for Ukraine, including a support package targeted at the health sector focusing on modernising the public health system and increasing the capacity of the Ministry of Health, which added up to EUR 105 Million. The EU has also contributed more than 150,000 respirators, 170,000 masks and 60,000 gowns to the National Police of Ukraine. EU Member States are also providing bilateral contributions and medical assistance.

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 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 economic 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*, 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.