



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation N°946
Vienna, 11 March 2020**

EU Statement on the Security Situation in and around Ukraine

Mr Chairman, it has been three weeks since our last discussion at this Forum about the conflict in eastern Ukraine and the illegal annexation of Crimea. Unfortunately, in the meantime, the security situation has not improved. The SMM reports, which we have been receiving in the past few weeks and which we highly value, continue to paint a rather bleak picture.

Despite of the fact that the sides have committed and recommitted numerous times to the ceasefire, we still do not see anything like the full, unlimited and comprehensive ceasefire that was supposed to be in place by the end of last year. The SMM weekly report of 3 March alone, reported more than 4,000 ceasefire violations. And we should not forget either the significant spike of violence on 18 February in the Luhansk region, near the Zolote disengagement area which showed how fragile the security situation is and how easily positive steps can be reversed. The beginning of this month was regrettably also marked by civilian casualties and a high number of fatalities among Ukrainian military personnel.

In this context, the EU again calls on the sides to swiftly and fully implement the Minsk agreements and honour their commitments in full and in good faith. Complying with previous agreements is a prerequisite for building confidence and further progress. The Ukrainian leadership has demonstrated a constructive approach and the political will to end the conflict. It is time for Russia to act

likewise. We regret that Russia did not take part in the recent Normandy Four military expert meeting. We call on Russia to return to the Joint Centre for Control and Coordination and to fully assume its responsibility and to use its considerable influence over the armed formations it backs to meet the Minsk commitments in full.

We underline the urgency of mine action. Mines continue to be the main cause of casualties among civilians. Eight out of fourteen civilian victims have been injured by mines this year. We are particularly concerned by the continued use of anti-personnel mines. On 28 February the SMM spotted another anti-personnel mine near non-government controlled Molodizhne, only 10 metres from a road used by civilians and the SMM. We deplore the fact that anti-personnel mines continue to be used and that civilians, including children, continue to be injured. We urge those responsible to refrain from the use of such explosive devices. Also, as weather conditions are improving, we call for increased demining activity and for the implementation of the recent Normandy commitment regarding an updated demining plan.

We reaffirm our strong support to the SMM and reiterate our commitment to back the Mission in every possible way, including financially and by providing qualified staff and appropriate equipment, allowing it to continue to implement its mandate effectively. The safety and security of the SMM is of primary importance to us. We strongly deplore any attempts to harass, intimidate or impede the work of the SMM and its monitors and condemn the continued threats and restrictions, which occur overwhelmingly in non-government-controlled areas. In the weekly report issued last week the SMM informed about 25 cases of denials of access, with all but one imposed by the Russia -backed armed formations.

The SMM must have safe, secure, unconditional and unimpeded access to the entire territory of Ukraine, with a view to the implementation of its mandate to its full extent. This includes the illegally annexed Crimea and the city of Sevastopol

and along the Ukraine-Russia state border. We recall our position that any impediments to the SMM's work, including attempts to destroy the SMM's assets, are unacceptable. Those responsible for any wilful damage, destruction or loss of SMM UAVs and other assets should be held accountable, both politically and financially.

We reiterate our deep concern about the presence of military equipment from Russia in the conflict zone. The SMM informed in the weekly report, dated 25 February, that on 17 February its long-range UAV spotted, while experiencing signal interference, three electronic warfare systems and an active radar system near non-government-controlled Verbova Balka in Donetsk region. Such sophisticated military equipment is not easy to get by and it is highly doubtful that it was produced locally. We call on Russia to immediately stop providing financial and military support to the armed formations. We recall our position that all foreign armed formations, military equipment and mercenaries must be removed from Ukraine.

We remain firm in our 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. Respect for these principles and commitments must be restored. We underline Russia's responsibility in this regard and once again call on Russia to use its considerable influence over the armed formations it backs to meet these commitments in full. We call on Russia to immediately stop providing financial and military support to the armed formations. The ceasefire must be respected. All Minsk-regulated weapons must be withdrawn. Re-establishing full Ukrainian control over its state border is essential.

In conclusion, we recall our unwavering support to the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders and call upon Russia to do likewise. We urge Russia to recognise 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. We continue to call on Russia to ensure unhindered and free passage to and from the Sea of Azov in accordance with international law. We express our deep concern about the ongoing large-scale militarisation of the Crimean peninsula by Russia, which continues to impact the security situation in the Black Sea region and beyond.

The Candidate Countries the 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, GEORGIA, ANDORRA and SAN MARINO align themselves with the statement.

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