



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1259
Vienna, 13 February 2020

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

Mr. Chairperson, the European Union commends the Albanian Chairmanship for keeping the resolution of this conflict at the top of the OSCE's agenda and at the centre of the continued international diplomatic efforts, as it was expressed by Chairperson-in-Office Prime Minister Rama to the United Nations Security Council during his visit in New York last week.

We reiterate the importance of fully implementing the commitments of the Minsk Agreements, including those undertaken at the Normandy Four Summit on 9 December, in good faith. Complying with previous agreements is a prerequisite for building confidence and making further steps. In this context, we commend the Ukrainian leadership for their constructive approach and the political will to negotiate an end to the conflict and call on Russia to do likewise.

We take note that the SMM recorded almost 40 per cent decrease in ceasefire violations last week compared with the previous one. However, the number of those violations (3200) is still very high. We remain deeply concerned about the persistent ceasefire violations, leading to civilian casualties, as well as fatalities amongst the Ukrainian servicemen. We are especially concerned about the continued ceasefire violations inside the Petrivske area and on the periphery of the Zolote area. One of the most urgent tasks remains the implementation of a full, unlimited and comprehensive ceasefire. We call on the sides to increase their efforts to this end, in line with the commitments undertaken at the Normandy Summit in Paris.

We also look forward to further discussions on new disengagement areas within the Trilateral Contact Group. This, together with demining activities, is important as it enables a safe and secure freedom of movement of the civilian population living near the contact line. We also call for full and unconditional access of the International Committee of the Red Cross, as well as other international organisations, to all detained persons, as agreed by the Normandy Four leaders.

We are deeply concerned by the reported activities, e.g. the SMM report dated 7 February, that the Russia-backed formations continue to fortify the outside edges of the disengagement areas, installing heavy weapons, including in the vicinity of residential buildings, and laying mines, including antipersonnel mines. We call on Russia to use its considerable influence on the armed formations it backs to see the commitments agreed upon in the Normandy Summit fully respected.

We repeat our call on Russia to return to the JCCC. We are concerned about the presence of armed formations, wearing armbands with JCCC written on them, in the disengagement areas. We also call on Russia to use the considerable influence it has on the armed formations it backs to see the commitments agreed upon in the Normandy Summit fully respected. We once again urge the sides to adhere to the TCG agreement on disengagement. The TCG framework decision on disengagement of September 2016 must be respected.

Mr. Chairperson, the SMM remains our most reliable source of information of the situation on the ground. We highly value its regular and thematic reports. We reiterate our commitment to back the Mission in every possible way, including financially and by providing qualified staff and appropriate equipment. We call on all participating States to make efforts in order to close the funding gap and engage in an appropriate financing of the mission. We commend those participating States who have already made substantial and voluntary contributions.

The safety and security of the SMM is of primary importance. The EU strongly deplores any attempts to harass, intimidate or impede the work of SMM personnel and condemns the continued threats and restrictions to the SMM, which occur predominantly in non-government controlled areas. This practice hampers the SMM

from fulfilling its mandate. The SMM must have safe, secure, unconditional and unimpeded access to the entire territory of Ukraine in order to fully implement its mandate. This access includes the illegally annexed Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol and the area along the Ukraine-Russia state border, to which the SMM is systematically denied access by Russia-backed formations. We strongly condemn actions which jeopardise the security of SMM monitors.

We also deplore the targeting of SMM assets, including SMM UAVs, by means of signal interference and small arms fire occurring almost on a daily basis in non-government controlled areas. Those responsible for any wilful damage, destruction or loss of SMM UAVs and other assets should be held accountable, both politically and financially.

Mr. Chairperson, the European Union continues to remain deeply concerned about the dire situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the Ukraine's Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol since its illegal annexation by Russia. Over the past six years, residents of the peninsula have been facing systematic restrictions of the human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, association, religion or belief. The situation of persons belonging to national minorities remains precarious. Representatives of the Crimean Tatar community and its self-governing body, the Mejlis, continue to face systematic persecution. The Russian anti-extremism laws, introduced after the illegal annexation, stifle dissent and intimidate Crimean Tatars who oppose the illegal annexation. Several harsh prison sentences were meted out to Crimean Tatars during 2019 on charges related to extremism and subversion. Reports point out a narrowing of space for manifestation of Ukrainian and Crimean Tartar identities and enjoyment of the respective cultures in Crimea.

In this context, we note the long overdue suspension of the sentence of the Ukrainian RFE/RL journalist, Mykola Semena. We call on Russia to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms in Ukraine's Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol and to grant international and regional human rights monitoring mechanisms unrestricted access to the region. We call once again on Russia to release all the political prisoners currently detained in Russia and in Crimea.

Moreover, the situation in the non-government controlled areas in eastern Ukraine also remains dire, with violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions, sexual and gender-based violence.

We continue to call on Russia to ensure unhindered and free passage to and from the Sea of Azov in accordance with international law.

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*, and the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

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