



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Permanent Council No. 1287 Vienna, 29 October 2020

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

Mr. Chairman, the European Union welcomes the overall professional and effective conduct of the local elections in Ukraine. The direct involvement of the citizens in the life of their local communities, including persons belonging to national minorities, is a core element of democracy. However, many Ukrainians are still deprived of this basic right, as parts of their country are subjected to the ongoing acts of aggression in eastern Ukraine by the Russia-backed armed formations and the illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol.

Against this background, the EU fully supports the continued international diplomatic efforts within the Normandy format and the Trilateral Contact Group aimed at reaching a political solution to the conflict in eastern Ukraine in line with the OSCE principles and commitments. We hope that the topic of local elections in Ukraine can stop being a matter of contention and that substantial discussions within the TCG can resume, especially on political aspects, in order to enable the sides to formalize the arrangements on issues such as new disengagement areas, updated demining plans and further exchanges of detainees. In this regard, we commend Ukraine for its constructive approach and call on Russia to reciprocate.

The EU welcomes the overall adherence to the ceasefire. The relatively stable situation in the Luhansk area inspires a cautious optimism. At the same time, the developments in the Donetsk area are worrying. The increase in explosions recorded recently near the Donetsk Filtration Station, as well as the regular

presence of people within the disengagement areas, jeopardize the progress recently achieved. Moreover, weapons have still been observed in violation of withdrawal lines, overwhelmingly on the non-government controlled side, including in the residential areas, which could negatively impact the security situation. We urge the sides to keep their commitments to the ceasefire and to refrain from actions that could put it at risk. In this context, we underline the importance of a functioning coordination mechanism and reiterate our call on Russia to return to the Joint Centre for Control and Coordination.

The humanitarian situation on the ground also remains a focus for the EU. We deplore that there have been five more civilian casualties by incidents involving explosive objects and mines, amongst them two boys injured on 6 October. We remain deeply concerned about the hardship of civilians at the nearly completely closed entry-exit-checkpoints where people are prevented from crossing the contact line, returning to their homes or receiving medical treatment or the payment of their pensions. We urge the sides to remove these obstacles that further deepen the gap between the government and non-government controlled areas.

We thank the Albanian OSCE Chairmanship for organizing the informal meeting with the SMM Chief Monitor last Friday. We welcome the implementation by the SMM of stringent precautionary measures in response to the pandemic to ensure the continued safety of the SMM monitors. However, the second wave of the epidemic requires additional efforts in order to strike the right balance between the operability of the SMM, in line with its mandate, and the duty of care, in particular the internal management of positive Covid-19 cases. The EU stands ready to support the SMM in this respect.

The pandemic situation makes the SMM's technical assets more important than ever to ensure the Mission's ability to implement its mandate. However, the SMM reports frequently about both signal interference as well as small arms fire against the UAVs. We deplore the continued action designed to compromise the functioning of these assets. We recall 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 EU 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-governmental-controlled areas. The SMM must have

safe, secure, unconditional und unimpeded access to the entire territory of Ukraine, including the areas along the Ukrainian-Russian State border, in accordance with its mandate. The Mission must not be forced to operate de facto as three separate entities. We urge Russia to use its considerable and undeniable influence over the armed formations it backs to ensure that all undue restrictions on the SMM are removed.

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 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.