



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1243 Vienna, 10 October 2019

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

Mr. Chairman, last week, the European Union welcomed the news received after the 1st of October TCG meeting in Minsk. We regret the disengagement of forces in Zolote and Petrivske agreed for the 7th of October was postponed due to the shelling targeting the positions of Ukrainian forces in these areas and hope the disengagement there will restart without further delay.

Regretfully, despite the agreement reached in the TCG, the security situation in the conflict areas continues to be volatile with several significant spikes in ceasefire violations resulting in casualties. Last week the SMM continued to observe the presence of weapons in violation of withdrawal lines and mines, some of which were spotted for the first time. We once again reiterate our call to disengage, withdraw heavy weapons and step up efforts for comprehensive mine action. All Minsk-regulated weapons must be withdrawn. All foreign armed formations, military equipment and mercenaries must be removed from Ukraine.

We reaffirm our position that the full Ukrainian control over its state border is essential for the implementation of the Minsk Agreements.

Furthermore, we recall that proper security conditions are indispensable for holding, within the framework of the Ukrainian legislation, local elections in certain areas in Donbas, monitored by ODIHR, in accordance with OSCE standards. We will be closely following the developments and call for a constructive approach from Russia and the armed formations it backs in this regard.

Regarding the security situation, there are certainly positive developments, which we welcome and strongly encourage, like the adherence to the ceasefire recommitment of 21 July and the disengagement of forces and repair works in Stanytsia Luhanska. We strongly hope that the progress in the TCG will translate into an overall improved security situation on the ground and would also allow for the start of disengagement in Zolote and Pertrivske. This would ease the suffering for those civilians living close to the contact line who bear the brunt of this conflict. In this regard, we commend the Ukrainian leadership for its unwavering commitment to the peaceful conflict resolution and call on Russia and the armed formation it backs to act likewise.

Mr. Chairman, the SMM remains our source of reliable information of the situation on the ground. We highly value its regular and thematic reports. 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. This includes the illegally annexed Crimea and the city of Sevastopol and along the Ukraine-Russia state border, to which the SMM is systematically denied access by Russia-backed formations. We once again deplore targeting of SMM assets, including SMM UAVs, by means of signal interference and small arms fire. 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 utmost concern about the Russian presidential decrees and their extensions, enabling the simplified issuing of Russian passports to Ukrainian citizens, which constitutes yet another attack on the sovereignty of Ukraine and runs counter to the spirit and objectives of the Minsk agreements. In this context, we wish to inform our partners that last week the European Commission and the EEAS sent guidance to the Member States and Schengen associated countries'

consulates on how to identify and not to recognise the passports issued in the implementation of the Russian presidential decree of 24 April, in contradiction to the Minsk agreements.

We reiterate our position on the unjustified use of force by Russia near the Kerch Strait on 25 November 2018, its negative impact in the Black and Azov seas and Russia's violations of international law. We call on Russia to return to Ukraine's custody the three vessels seized in the Black Sea on the 25th of November last year, in accordance with the binding order of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea. We further call on Russia to ensure unhindered and free passage to and from the Sea of Azov, in accordance with international law. Respect for international court rulings is fundamental for an international rules-based order.

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, GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

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