



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1339 Vienna, 11 October 2021

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

1. The EU regrets the heavy toll the conflict, resulting from Russia’s continuous acts of aggression against Ukraine, continues to take on the civilian population in the conflict zone. We are concerned about the fragile security situation as the SMM last month registered on average 262 ceasefire violations per day, which is a significant increase compared to the daily average of 21 violations in September 2020. So far in 2021, the SMM has confirmed 72 civilian casualties, including 15 fatalities, with August and September being the worst months.
2. In addition, the 18-month-long partial closure of check points at the contact line and the burdensome restrictions, introduced under the pretext of the Covid-19 pandemic by the Russia-backed armed formations, have had a serious negative impact upon the civilians in conflict-affected areas. The number of crossings from January to August 2021 fell by over 95 percent compared with the period before the COVID-19 pandemic while the now closed Border Monitoring Mission to Gukovo and Donetsk has previously reported that the crossings at the Russia-Ukraine state border have already returned to pre-pandemic levels. The closure of the EECPs has particularly affected women who represent the majority of civilians crossing the contact line. We regret that although the entry-exit check points in Zolote and Shchastia have been open on the government-controlled side since 10 November 2020, the corresponding checkpoints of the Russia-backed armed formations have remained closed. We would like to see progress on the full opening of these EECPs, as well as the reopening of all other checkpoints which are currently closed.

3. We are deeply concerned by the continued presence of mines and unexploded ordnance in the conflict zone. During the last three months, four civilians were killed or injured due to such objects, all in the immediate surroundings of their homes. The presence of these explosive objects has a negative impact on civilians' freedom of movement which is affecting many aspects of daily life, including access to health care, education and livelihoods. Their presence also affect civilians' access to vital services such as water, gas, electricity and telecommunication as repairs and maintenance of these sites only can be carried out after mine clearance. We repeat our call on the sides to adhere to the ceasefire and to do their utmost in order to move forward on the new demining plan in the Trilateral Contact Group, as agreed upon at the last Normandy Summit in Paris in December 2019.
4. The Minsk agreements consist of the Minsk Protocol of 5 September 2014, the Minsk Memorandum of 19 September 2014 and the Minsk Package of Measures of 12 February 2015. As a signatory of the Minsk agreements, Russia has clearly accepted its binding responsibility to the peaceful conflict settlement. We call on Russia, as a party to the conflict, to act constructively within the Trilateral Contact Group and to implement the Minsk agreements in full.
5. Madam Chair, the SMM should have full and unhindered access to the entire territory of Ukraine, including the border areas temporarily not under Ukrainian government control and the illegally annexed Crimean peninsula. We urge Russia to use its considerable influence over the armed formations it backs in order to make sure that all restrictions on the SMM's freedom of movement and impediments to the Mission's technical assets are removed. In addition, we recall our support for the plans of the SMM to open additional Forward Patrol Bases in the areas under effective control by Russia backed armed formations, closer to the Ukraine-Russia state border, as well as a much wider use of other technical assets, such as long range UAVs, in their work.
6. 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.

7. 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 TURKEY, 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 align themselves with this statement.

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