



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation N°945 Vienna, 6 May 2020

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#### EU Statement on the Security Situation in and around Ukraine

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Mr Chairperson, it has been almost two months since our last discussion at this Forum about the conflict in eastern Ukraine and the illegal annexation of Crimea. Unfortunately, the security situation has not improved, but deteriorated. The Mission continued to report ceasefire violations, also within and around disengagement areas, newly discovered mines and unexploded ordnance, including prohibited anti-personnel landmines. We deeply regret the high human toll that this conflict is taking on the civilian population and the Ukrainian military personnel.

The videoconference of Normandy Four Foreign Ministers last Thursday was a timely reminder of the need to intensify the efforts towards the implementation in good faith of the commitments, including those undertaken at the Normandy Summit on 9 December. There is still a lot of work to be done within the TCG. In this context, we commend the constructive approach of the Ukrainian leadership and call on Russia to act likewise. We also call for a comprehensive ceasefire, one of the key elements of these commitments, in particular in these times of pandemic. It is essential in this respect to heed the call by UN Secretary General Guterres.

We welcome the release and exchange of detainees which took place on 16 April. This was a welcome step in the right direction. However, the efforts towards the release of all remaining conflict-related detainees according to the formula “all identified for all identified”, in line with the Minsk agreements, should continue.

The EU remains gravely concerned about the restrictions of movement the SMM is facing under the pretext of COVID-19. These restrictions add to the worrying long-term trend, as shown in the latest SMM Thematic Report. They put at risk the functioning of the Mission, which was set up as a single, unified entity which must not be broken up into separate parts. We note that the SMM has taken extremely stringent external and internal precautionary measures in response to the pandemic, to ensure the continued safety of all, including the safety of the local population. The Ukrainian authorities made it possible for the Mission and other international organisations to continue with their activities notwithstanding the current difficult circumstances. It is crucial that the Russia-backed armed formations allow the SMM full freedom of movement, including across the contact line. We urge Russia to use its influence over the armed formations it backs to stop the blockade of the SMM at the checkpoints.

We strongly deplore all attempts to impede the work of the SMM and its monitors. The SMM, as often said in this forum, remains our “eyes and ears” in the conflict zone. Its legitimate presence should not be put into question by physical threats, denials of access or targeting its assets. Intentional spreading of disinformation in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic and the SMM must also stop immediately.

Furthermore, as the Mission’s technical assets are of vital importance during the current circumstances for the SMM’s ability to implement its mandate, we deplore any action that endangers the functioning of these assets. Those responsible for any wilful damage, destruction or loss of SMM UAVs and other assets should be held accountable, both politically and financially.

We deplore the fact that anti-personnel mines continue to be used and that civilians, including children, continue to be injured. It was therefore with great concern that we read in the latest weekly report that the SMM discovered 20 new such mines and assessed them as belonging to the Russia-backed armed formations. In this context, we urge those responsible to refrain from the use of such explosive devices

and reiterate the urgency of the work that remains to be done in the de-mining process, including the development and implementation of an updated de-mining plan.

Mr Chairperson, the EU continues to follow closely the worrying developments on the Crimean peninsula which is part of Ukraine. We do not recognise the illegal annexation of the Crimean peninsula by Russia, which is a clear violation of international law. Therefore, we strongly condemn the recently announced conscription of residents of the peninsula to the Russian Federation Armed Forces. This is a violation of international humanitarian law, which also Russia is bound by.

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, 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 this statement.

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