



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1299 Vienna, 21 January 2021

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

Madame Chair, at the outset of this new year, let us reiterate our condemnation of Russia’s illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol and the acts of aggression in eastern Ukraine by the Russian armed forces. These acts are a blatant breach of international law and of the OSCE principles and commitments which are fundamental to the European security order. We welcome that the new Swedish OSCE Chair will keep the resolution of this conflict at the top of the OSCE agenda. The fact that Ukraine was the first participating State visited by the new Chairperson-in-Office, Minister Ann Linde, is proof of this.

Madame Chair, despite the fact that there was a ceasefire regime in place for much of 2020, it was nonetheless a particularly challenging year for the civilian population. The Covid-19 pandemic and the associated restrictions created additional burdens on a population that already endures the hardship of an artificial boundary in their country. The new SMM thematic report informs us that the number of civilian crossings over the contact line has dropped by over 90 percent since the introduction of the pandemic restrictions in March. As a result, hundreds of thousands of civilians are separated from family members and cut off from their livelihood, pensions, medical care and other services. It is appalling to hear the numerous stories of civilians forced to spend the night in hazardous conditions at the EECs or being prevented from crossing due to administrative hurdles. This is even more deplorable

against the background that thousands of civilians are allowed to cross the uncontrolled part of the border to Russia every day. Even in this time of pandemic, the crossing by civilians over the contact line should be facilitated as much as possible. We welcome the steps taken by Ukraine to open the Shchastia and Zolote EECPs and urge Russia to use its considerable influence over the armed formations it backs in order to ensure a synchronized and transparent opening of these two EECPs, as well as the reopening of all currently closed EECPs.

While the adoption of the additional ceasefire measures in July represented an undeniable breakthrough and a substantial and tangible improvement of the security situation, we regret breaches of the ceasefire which are unfortunately occurring daily and with increasing frequency. These breaches and local escalations pose a real danger to the population in the region, as we have seen from the number of casualties, also among Ukrainian servicemen, and damages to civilian property and infrastructure. For instance, on 29 December, an inhabited house was damaged due to small-arms fire in the Luhansk region and on 8 January, a boy was injured when an explosive device detonated in the Donetsk region.

The EU fully supports the continued efforts within the Normandy format and the Trilateral Contact Group to reach a sustainable political solution to the conflict. We take note of the meeting of the diplomatic advisers of the Normandy format in Berlin on 12 January. We hope that their next discussion, envisaged for tomorrow 22 January, will lead to tangible progress.

Last week, the European Court of Human Rights declared partial admissibility of Ukraine's complaints against Russia concerning a pattern of violations of the European Convention on Human Rights by the Russian Federation in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol in 2014. The court found that Russia already exercised control over Crimea before the illegal so-called referendum was held. This is a landmark decision in holding Russia accountable for its actions in Crimea.

We remain concerned about the worrying trend in arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, forced conscriptions, forcible transfers and deportations of Crimean residents by the Russian Federation, including of ethnic Ukrainians and Crimean

Tatars and those attempting to oppose the de-facto authorities. We regret the fact that on 12 January, another three Ukrainian citizens, Aider Dzhapparov, Enver Omerov, and Riza Omerov, were convicted in the Russian Federation on alleged charges of "organizing and participating in a terrorist organization and violent seizure and keeping of power".

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 fueling 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.