



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1305 Vienna, 11 March 2021

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

Madam Chair, as we celebrate International Women’s Day this week, we would like to highlight the situation of women and girls in the conflict-affected areas of Ukraine. Due to the acts of aggression by the Russian Federation, Ukraine has currently more than 1.7 million internally displaced persons, out of which a majority are women. Women and men have lost their homes, incomes, businesses and pensions. Many women have lost their husbands and partners in the conflict, which has increased the number of female single parent households and aggravated the burden of unpaid work in caring for children, the elderly and persons with disabilities, thus limiting their freedom of movement and livelihood opportunities.

The restrictions on crossing the contact line have significantly impacted the lives of women and men on both sides. Hundreds of thousands are separated from family members and cut off from medical care and other public services. A majority of those crossing to collect their pensions, often in very difficult conditions, are women. We urge Russia to implement its commitments undertaken at the last Normandy Summit by using its considerable influence over the armed formations it backs in order to ensure that the Shchastia and Zolote EECs, and all other currently closed EECs, reopen without further delay. We note positively that, last week, a UN humanitarian convoy was allowed to cross the checkpoint near Shchastia for the first time.

In order to achieve a sustainable peace in eastern Ukraine, the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in negotiations between the parties to the conflict, and all related decision-making processes, needs to be ensured. Women are playing

a crucial role in local social cohesion activities and in Ukraine's civil society, for example in ensuring that humanitarian assistance can access education and healthcare facilities on both sides of the contact line. We therefore regret that the Covid-19 pandemic and the overall political dynamics are having negative impacts upon women's ability to participate in peace-building activities.

We commend the leadership of Ambassador Grau in the work of the Trilateral Contact Group, which consists of Ukraine and Russia with the OSCE as mediator. We call on Russia to act constructively within these discussions. Political considerations should not prevail over humanitarian issues.

The safety of the women and men in the SMM is our top priority. Although the July ceasefire is still largely holding, the increasingly fragile security situation along the contact line is a cause of real concern. We urge Russia to uphold its commitments and ensure the SMM's safe, secure, unconditional and unimpeded access to the entire territory of Ukraine, including Crimea and the areas along the Ukraine-Russia state border.

The SMM's technical assets are of vital importance for its ability to implement its mandate. We therefore 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 welcome the SMM's monitoring of issues pertaining to gender equality and the implementation of UNSCR 1325 on women, peace and security, including the full, effective and meaningful participation of women in conflict resolution. We also encourage the SMM to continue to promote gender mainstreaming across all the Mission's activities and to further explore ways to create synergies between local activities, including those undertaken by female-led NGOs, and the high-level conflict resolution formats.

We call for the immediate release of all women and men being detained in the illegally annexed Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea and sentenced in breach of international law, including those of the Crimean Tatar origin.

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*, the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, 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.