



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1262 Vienna, 12 March 2020

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

In any conflict, the people most affected are the civilians. Women, men and children of all ages, including elderly and the vulnerable, who are just trying to continue their everyday life, have to experience how their homeland is turned into a warzone.

This is the current situation in eastern Ukraine. As a result of Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol in 2014 and the still ongoing acts of aggression in eastern Ukraine, more than 3,5 million people on both sides of the line of contact remain in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. The situation is characterised by indiscriminate shelling of civilian infrastructure, water stoppages, electricity cuts and environmental damage. There are severe issues regarding health, food and livelihood, shelter, protection and access to basic infrastructure and utilities, including water provision.

The conflict continues to have a dramatic impact on civilians also this year: as reported last Monday by the SMM Deputy Chief Monitor, during the first two months of 2020, the Mission registered 21 civilian casualties and 38 civilian objects damaged by shelling and small arms fire. Only the recent escalation has led to six more civilian casualties and multiple damages to residential houses and a school. We deplore these escalations as the population is in dire need of a fully respected ceasefire.

In a situation like this, it is of utmost importance that the civilian population will be provided with humanitarian assistance. We therefore welcome international humanitarian assistance delivered to Ukraine under the auspices of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. We recall that since 2014, the EU and its Members States have contributed more than €762 million in humanitarian and early recovery aid to the Ukrainian population. The EU addresses both the needs of people in the areas directly affected by the conflict and those who

have fled the conflict areas. One measure has been emergency financial assistance, where the EU has provided €141.8 million in total and €23 million allocated in 2019. Approximately half is directed at vulnerable people living in the non-government controlled areas. This relief aid targets those most in need, including female-headed households, the elderly, children, and persons with disabilities.

The European Union stresses that the humanitarian aid provided in Ukraine must be in conformity with international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. It must be needs-based and aimed solely at the protection and assistance of the population in need. This is why we repeatedly have expressed our concern about the Russian so-called “humanitarian convoys” entering Ukrainian territory from Russia at the Donetsk Border Crossing Point without the consent of the Ukrainian authorities, some of them even entering military compounds, acting in clear violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as of fundamental international humanitarian principles. We have not seen any evidence that the humanitarian aid, which Russia claims to deliver with these convoys, has had any sizeable impact on the population concerned.

Humanitarian assistance should be delivered through an international mechanism and coordinated at international level. The International Committee of the Red Cross sends trucks with humanitarian aid over the line of contact on a regular basis. The United Nations and many participating States around this table have also been active in providing humanitarian relief to Ukraine. However, many humanitarian organisations experience that the so-called “authorities” in certain regions of Donetsk and Luhansk have introduced significant restrictions on their work in the non-governmental controlled areas. Only a few organisations are allowed to operate there while others have been expelled. We once again call on Russia to join an international mechanism for the delivery of humanitarian assistance, as foreseen in the Minsk agreements, and use its considerable influence over the armed formations it backs to ensure these mechanisms full access to the whole territory of Ukraine.

As said before, it is important that the international community receive an accurate understanding of the situation of the civilians affected by the conflict. We commend the SMM for their Human Dimension activities and thematic reports that are an essential base for a better understanding of the humanitarian situation on the ground.

That is why we call on Russia to use its influence to provide the SMM safe, secure, unconditional and unimpeded access to the entire territory of Ukraine in line with the Mission's mandate. Any action that jeopardises the security of the SMM monitors and their assets, including the functioning of their UAVs, is also a threat towards the security situation for all the inhabitants of eastern Ukraine. Those responsible for any willful damage, destruction or loss of SMM UAVs and other assets should be held accountable, both politically and financially.

The EU calls on the sides to implement the actions that were agreed upon in the Normandy Summit in Paris in December as this would lead to an improvement in the humanitarian situation for the civilian population along the contact line and represent steps toward a full implementation of the Minsk agreements and toward a sustainable political solution of the conflict in full respect of the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence of Ukraine. We commend the Ukrainian leadership for the constructive approach and the political will to negotiate an end to the conflict that has resulted in more than 13.000 casualties. We call on Russia to act likewise.

We continue to call on Russia to ensure unhindered and free passage to and from the Sea of Azov in accordance with international law.

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 and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, as well as the UKRAINE, 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.