



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council 1415
Vienna, 16 March 2023**

**EU Statement on the Russian Federation's ongoing aggression
against Ukraine**

1. 16 March 2022 was one of the darkest days of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. On this day exactly a year ago, the Mariupol Drama Theatre was heavily shelled by the Russian Armed Forces, killing hundreds of civilians. The theatre had served as a clearly marked shelter for Ukrainian civilians, including children. Since October 2022, Russian forces have continuously and deliberately targeted civilian objects and critical infrastructure in Ukraine, with grave humanitarian consequences for the Ukrainian population. Such deliberate attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure are shameful, reprehensible and totally unacceptable. They amount to war crimes.
2. In the course of nearly 13 months of Russia's full-scale war of aggression, launched by the Kremlin with the objective of undermining Ukraine's statehood and identity and in pursuance of its imperialistic ambitions, Ukrainian children have become one of Russia's primary targets. We are deeply concerned by increasing evidence that children have been separated from their families or guardians, forcibly transferred or deported to Russia, and illegally put up for adoption. The abduction and forcible transfer or deportation of children, and the changing of their personal status – including nationality – is a clear and heinous violation of international human rights and international humanitarian law, including of the Geneva Conventions. Ukrainian children are also reportedly being placed in facilities where they have to attend sessions of pro-Russian so-called "military and patriotic education". The EU is also very concerned that the forcible displacement of these children may expose them to risks of human trafficking and exploitation, child labour, forced recruitment and sexual and gender-based violence.

3. The EU is firmly committed to holding all those responsible, including commanders, perpetrators and accomplices of war crimes and other most serious crimes committed in connection with Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, to account. In this context, we recall the joint initiative by the European Commission and Poland to trace Ukrainian children abducted by Russian forces and its proxies, to collect evidence and to ensure that the perpetrators are held to account for their crimes. In addition, the EU calls on the OSCE and its participating States to make the best use of all available OSCE tools to help Ukrainian children return to their families, protect them, and help bring all those responsible of related crimes to account.
4. The EU also fully supports Ukraine's and the international community's efforts towards the establishment of an appropriate mechanism for the prosecution of the crime of aggression, which is of concern to the international community as a whole.
5. We urge Russia to respect the provisions of the Third Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. In this context, we condemn the 13-year sentence handed down on 10 March to Maksym Butkevych, a Ukrainian serviceman and prominent human rights defender and journalist, in the illegally Russian-occupied area of the Luhansk region of Ukraine. We recall that all prisoners of war must be treated humanely according to international humanitarian law.
6. The EU reiterates its support for President Zelenskyy's initiative for a comprehensive, just and sustainable peace. Any diplomatic solution to Russia's war must be based on the full respect of international law and its rules and principles, including those enshrined in the UN Charter, the Helsinki Final Act and the Paris Charter. Regrettably, we have not seen to date any willingness on Russia's side for such a peace. The Kremlin is only repeating its ultimatums and

doubling down on its aggression against Ukraine, also threatening the security and stability of other countries in the region.

7. While we continue to address the tragic consequences of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine that started on 24 February 2022, we recall that Russia's aggression started a long time ago. On 16 March 2014, exactly nine years ago, the Kremlin organised a so-called "referendum" in the illegally annexed Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. This sham "referendum" was conducted in violation of Ukraine's Constitution and international law. The "referendum" and its outcome were illegal, and the international community assessed them as such. Crimea is, and will always be, Ukraine! The Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson regions, where Russia attempted to reenact the very same scenario in September 2022, are, and will always be, Ukraine, too! The EU remains firmly committed to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders. Ukraine has the right, based on the UN Charter, to liberate all of its territories illegally occupied by Russia. We will continue to stand with Ukraine as long as it takes, including by providing Ukraine with all necessary support in this regard.
8. Mr Chair, the Kremlin's propaganda and disinformation, so actively spread in public fora and through its state-controlled media outlets and diplomatic channels, have to be effectively countered. Since 2014, we have clearly seen that Russia's military actions on the ground, its cyber-attacks, hybrid operations, and disinformation activities, are conducted in a concerted manner and towards the same goals. The OSCE, as an organisation that deals with both military and non-military security issues, cannot overlook this link and must address it in a comprehensive manner. We call on Russia to stop its disinformation activities and other malign actions against Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Georgia and other OSCE participating States.
9. We reiterate our call on Russia to immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its troops and military equipment from the entire territory of

Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders. In addition, we urge the Belarusian authorities to stop enabling Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, by permitting Russian armed forces to use Belarusian territory and by providing support and training to the Russian military. The Belarusian authorities must fully abide by their obligations under international law. The EU will continue to respond to all actions supporting Russia's unlawful and unjustified war of aggression and remains ready to move quickly with further restrictive measures against Belarus.

The Candidate Countries NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, ALBANIA*, UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, and BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA*, the Potential Candidate Country GEORGIA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as ANDORRA, MONACO and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

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