



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation N°1037
Vienna, 22 February 2023

EU Statement on Russia's ongoing military aggression against Ukraine

Mr Chair, in two days, we will mark **one-year of Russia's brutal full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine**. It was **President Putin's catastrophic and tragic decision to invade** its peaceful neighbour Ukraine. A decision that **unleashed unspeakable suffering** on the Ukrainian people and continues to **send shockwaves across the globe**. For years to come, Ukraine, the whole world, but also Russia, will be facing the consequences of this aggression, which will remain a bloody stain on the conscience of all those responsible. In addition to the appalling devastation in Ukraine, Russia has **inflicted serious damage to its own international standing, to the reputation of its armed forces and to the future of its people**.

We reiterate **our firmest condemnation** of Russia's unprovoked, unjustified and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine. In the face of this flagrant violation of international law, **all desperate attempts by Russia to justify** its full-scale war of aggression **are futile**. In recent weeks, on top of absurd and repulsive propaganda, Russia brought up the topic of the Minsk agreements, twisting the facts and hopelessly trying to drum it up at every meeting, including in the UN Security Council last week.

Let us put the record straight. **Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine started nine years ago**. In February 2014, the Russian Federation resorted to thinly veiled covert operations to illegally seize the Crimean peninsula and began to foment conflict in eastern Ukraine, which up to February 2022, cost over 14,000 lives.

To stop the bloodshed, the parties to the armed conflict, Ukraine and Russia, agreed to a negotiated process under the auspices of the OSCE. **The primary objective of the Minsk agreements was to stop hostilities and to reintegrate certain regions of Donetsk and Luhansk under Ukrainian sovereignty.** Instead, Russia had been actively inflaming tensions in Donbas, aiming at the internal destabilisation of Ukraine. Last week, the Kremlin's aide at the time of the signing of the Minsk agreements, Vladislav Surkov, admitted that Russia had no intention to abide by them. All diplomatic efforts within the Normandy format and the Trilateral Contact Group were foredoomed, because **Russia lacked the political will to fulfil the agreements in good faith.**

The Russian playbook in Ukraine has not changed. With the benefit of hindsight, we all know that **Russia misused the Minsk agreements to prepare for a full-scale war.** Despite its signatures and the agreement to establish the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM), Russia and its proxies systematically hindered the SMM from fulfilling its mandate in eastern Ukraine. Almost every weekly and flash report from the SMM was a crying testimony to Russian obstructionism. We do not forget and condemn in the strongest terms that **Russia still keeps SMM staff imprisoned and illegally seized OSCE assets.**

Mr Chair, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine **is firstly a war on civilians and the essential infrastructure that sustains them, a war that attacks our common rules-based order and breaks fundamental international legal norms,** including the UN Charter, OSCE principles and commitments as well as international human rights - and humanitarian law. We have witnessed time and again horrifying reports on mass atrocities and appalling brutality committed by Russian forces, the deliberate targeting of civilians, the devastation of Mariupol, the atrocities of Bucha and Irpin, the torture chambers, the massive deportations of Ukrainian children, widespread cases of sexual and gender-based violence or hundreds of innocent children killed.

Mr Chair, given all the atrocities the Russian forces have committed in Ukraine since the beginning of the aggression, it is essential to **ensure full accountability** for war crimes and the other most serious crimes, including the crime of aggression. All perpetrators, including the involved military commanders, must be held accountable for their actions. **Those committing crimes should know they cannot act with impunity.**

In the face of Russia's brutal war of aggression, Ukraine, is exercising its **inherent right of self-defence** in line with Article 51 of the UN Charter. The **EU and its Member States**, alongside international partners, **have supported Ukraine** in this cause from the very beginning. Moreover, we **will continue doing so as long as necessary and to the extent needed**. We have already provided over 12 billion euros in military support. EU Military Assistance Mission will train up to 30 000 Ukrainian troops by the end of this year. In this context, it must be emphasised that it is not the victim - nor those who help it in its rightful self-defence – who are responsible for the devastating consequences of Russia's war of aggression. The responsibility lies squarely with the aggressor, the Russian Federation.

The best military equipment would be of limited use if it were not for the **Ukrainians bravely and skilfully standing up to the aggressor**. With a strong will, courage and determination, they defend their independence, freedom and the right to choose their own future. Ukrainian soldiers did not heed the ill-conceived appeal of President Putin pronounced in the early hours of 24 February 2022 not to obey orders and to lay down arms. All Ukrainians continue to refuse to give in to Russia's attempts to impose its will upon them.

In conclusion, **we urge Russia to stop its war of aggression** and to immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all its troops and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders. We also **urge the Belarusian authorities to stop their support** of and refrain from any further involvement in or facilitation of Russia's illegal war of aggression.

Thank you!

The Candidate Countries NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, ALBANIA*, UKRAINE, REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA and BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA*, the Potential Candidate Country GEORGIA the EFTA countries

NORWAY, ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, as well ANDORRA 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.