



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1295 Vienna, 10 December 2020

EU Statement in response to the Address by the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Peter Maurer

The European Union warmly welcomes Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, to the Permanent Council. Mr. Maurer, we take this opportunity to pay tribute to the unique work carried out by the ICRC in challenging contexts worldwide and reassure you of the EU's continued support in this regard.

We reiterate our commitment to international humanitarian law and to the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence as well as to preventing politicization of humanitarian aid.

We highly value the ICRC as an independent and neutral organization which ensures humanitarian protection and assistance for victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence. We commend the work of the ICRC in protecting the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflicts. We especially appreciate your work on missing persons, visiting detention facilities, facilitating exchange of conflict-related detainees, and confidence building measures. This is a concrete and valuable contribution towards our shared goal of stability and peace.

This year, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented new challenges to humanitarian work. It has further strained the health care systems of conflict-affected countries, and puts vulnerable groups, such as internally displaced persons, at additional risk.

The grave humanitarian crisis caused by the conflict in eastern Ukraine and the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol by the Russian Federation has resulted in a situation where more than 3,5 million people on both sides of the line of contact remain in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. The ICRC, as well as UN agencies, have documented the patterns of severe human rights violations and abuses in Crimea, especially targeting the Crimean Tatar population and local Ukrainian communities. In eastern Ukraine, the situation is characterised by issues regarding health, food, livelihood, shelter, protection, the payment of pensions, and restricted access to basic infrastructure and utilities, including water. As one of a few humanitarian actors operating in non-government controlled areas, the work of the ICRC is crucial in order to restore vital infrastructure, including access to drinking water, to deliver humanitarian aid to those in need, as well as to train children and adults about mine awareness. This is why the EU is proud to be one of the largest humanitarian donors of the ICRC in Ukraine.

Moreover, we regret the fact that the access of the ICRC is severely restricted in the non-government controlled areas and in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, which are illegally annexed by Russia. The ICRC, and other humanitarian actors, need to have safe, sustained and unimpeded access throughout the whole territory of Ukraine, within its internationally recognized borders. We call for the ICRC to be afforded full, safe and unimpeded access to all detainees, including in the non-government controlled areas, in line with the Minsk agreements and the Paris Normandy Summit conclusions, as their access acts as an important safeguard and is a crucial element to prevent torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

We would also like to recall that humanitarian aid should be provided in conformity with international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles and through an international mechanism and coordinated at international level. Convoys entering Ukraine without the permission of the Ukrainian authorities is a violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The work of the ICRC in the context of recent developments related to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has been of great importance. We welcome the fact that the ICRC, in cooperation with local authorities, has provided emergency medical supplies, food and hygiene items as well other necessities to people in the region. The EU supports these operations of the ICRC with humanitarian funding. We also welcome the

contribution of the ICRC in facilitating the transfer of civilians across borders as well as the bodies of combatants killed in action and their provision of mental health and psychosocial services to those most affected. The EU recalls that the COVID-19 pandemic, in conjunction with the approaching winter, makes the situation urgent.

In concluding, we reiterate our gratitude to the ICRC President and to his staff who often carry out their duty in dangerous circumstances. We wish you, Mr. Maurer, every success in carrying out your important humanitarian mission.

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 UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA, ANDORRA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

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