



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation N°974 Vienna, 5 May 2021

EU Statement on the security situation in and around Ukraine

Mr. Chair, in the past few weeks the European Union and many other participating States expressed their concerns about unusual significant military activities of the Russian Federation in the areas adjacent to the state border of Ukraine and in the illegally annexed Crimea. As we stated last week, the announcement of the beginning of withdrawal of some troops at the border with Ukraine was a first step in the right direction which should be followed by action. We will continue to closely monitor the situation on the ground.

We recall our recommendations put forward in the special PC-FSC meeting on 14 April and join other pS in urging Russia to provide the necessary transparency on the activities of its military forces, including its troop and equipment movements, in compliance with its commitments under the Vienna Document and per Ukraine's request. We look forward to the VD inspection that Switzerland and Finland are planning to conduct in the Voronezh area and to the German-French VD evaluation visit in Southern Russia later this month. A briefing to this Forum by Russia on its military exercises close to the borders of neighbouring Ukraine which has very serious and well-justified concerns, would be an appropriate and welcome step.

Mr. Chair, the re-commitment to the ceasefire last July seemed to bring us all one step closer to the resolution of the conflict which clearly is not an internal Ukrainian conflict. It allowed to substantially reduce ceasefire violations and the resulting casualties, in

particular among the civilian population. Unfortunately, it did not translate into tangible and sustainable progress, despite the political will and readiness shown by Ukraine.

The degradation in the recent months of the security situation along the line of contact is of high concern. The previous positive trend risks to be reversed. We deeply regret that this has caused numerous lost lives and injuries of both military personnel and civilians in the conflict zone. Last month alone, 15 cases of civilians injured or killed, in connection with mines and unexploded ordnances, were reported to the SMM. This underscores an urgent need for a swift de-mining action. It is incomprehensible why despite Ukraine's readiness to start implementing it immediately the de-mining plan for 19 de-mining zones is still blocked in the TCG.

The unprecedented restrictions that the SMM is facing on its freedom of movement are unacceptable as they affect the mission's ability to fulfil its mandate. The SMM is being denied access on an almost daily basis by the Russia-backed armed formations in the non-government controlled areas. In addition, over recent weeks, the SMM UAVs have consistently been subjected to jamming and interference, making take-off and landing dangerous, which is a cause of concern. Following the crash of a long-range UAV on 7 March, on 23 April another such UAV was damaged during an emergency landing due to strong signal interference. We reiterate that those responsible for any wilful damage, destruction or loss of SMM UAVs and other assets should be held accountable, both politically and financially. Transparency, including at the areas near the Ukrainian-Russian State border currently not under control by the Ukrainian government, is of key importance.

We urge Russia to use its considerable influence over the armed formations it backs in order to make sure that all restrictions on the SMM's freedom of movement are removed and that the SMM and its assets can have safe and secure access to the entire territory of Ukraine, including Crimea.

We reiterate our strong support for the Minsk agreements and the efforts of both the Normandy Format and the Trilateral Contact Group to find a peaceful resolution of the

conflict, in full respect of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We call on Russia, as party to both of these formats, to move to a constructive approach in these negotiations and in the implementation of all the respective provisions it committed to.

We are also deeply concerned about Russia's announced closure of certain parts of the Black Sea until October 2021, which would be another provocative move violating the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. We recall that the freedom of navigation is guaranteed by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. We call on Russia to ensure unhindered and free passage to and from the Sea of Azov in accordance with international law. This closure, together with the continued militarisation of the illegally-annexed Crimean peninsula, has the potential to destabilise the security situation, not only in Ukraine, but also in the Black Sea region and beyond.

In conclusion, we remain firm in our 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. Respect for these principles and commitments must be restored. We underline Russia's responsibility in this regard and once again call on Russia to use its considerable influence over the armed formations it backs to meet these commitments in full. We reiterate our deep concern about the presence of military equipment and personnel from Russia in the conflict zone. We call on Russia to immediately stop providing financial and military support to the armed formations. The ceasefire must be respected. All Minsk-regulated weapons must be withdrawn. All foreign armed formations, military equipment and mercenaries must be removed from Ukraine. Re-establishing full Ukrainian control over its state border is essential.

We recall our unwavering support to the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders and call upon Russia to do likewise. We urge Russia to recognise 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 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, GEORGIA, ANDORRA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

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