



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1228 Vienna, 16 May 2019

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

Mr. Chairperson, on 10 May we marked the fifth anniversary of the arrest of Ukrainian film director Oleg Sentsov, who is serving a 20-year prison term in the Russian Federation on charges of terrorism after expressing peaceful opposition to the illegal annexation of Crimea. He was convicted and detained in a trial that fell short of international standards. No one should be imprisoned for their political beliefs. His continued detention is unjustified and creates a strong chilling effect for those in Crimea who have the right to express their views and opinions freely. We reiterate our call on Russia to release Oleg Sentsov. Pending the release of Mr Sentsov and other political prisoners, we expect Russia to allow access to them by Ukrainian authorities, including the Ukrainian ombudsperson.

We remain gravely concerned about the human rights situation in the Crimean Peninsula illegally annexed by the Russian Federation. Over the past four years the people living in the peninsula have been faced with severe restrictions to their fundamental freedoms. Over 70 other Ukrainian citizens are illegally detained in Crimea and the Russian Federation. The EU expects international human rights standards on the illegally annexed Crimean peninsula to be upheld and all illegally detained Ukrainian citizens on the peninsula and in Russia to be released without delay, including Volodomyr Balukh, Emir Hussein Kuku, Oleksandr Kolchenko, Pavlo Hryb, Edem Bekirov, the Crimean Tatars detained in March, and many others. We note that 18 May marks the 75th anniversary of the

deportation of the Crimean Tatars, among others. Sadly, this community has been especially targeted by human rights violations in Crimea.

Mr. Chairman, the EU remains deeply concerned about the situation on the ground in the area of the conflict, which is a consequence of acts of aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine. The two decrees signed recently by the Russian President offering expedited Russian citizenship for Ukrainian citizens currently resident in areas of Donbas controlled by Russia-backed armed formations and to Ukrainian citizens formerly resident in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol are yet another attack on Ukraine's sovereignty by Russia and underline Russia's intention to further destabilise Ukraine and to exacerbate the conflict. We reiterate our call on Russia to refrain from any actions that undermine the implementation of the Minsk agreements, and could impede the full restoration of Ukrainian government control over its territory within its internationally recognised borders.

We remain deeply concerned about the ongoing violence in the conflict area and its negative impact on civilians suffering from the threat it poses to their lives and damage to their houses and critical infrastructure. Over the past week the SMM saw fresh damage to functioning schools and to civilian properties on both sides of the contact line. Since the beginning of the year residential buildings were shelled several times in particular in non-government controlled Zolote-5/Mykhalivka and Dokuchaievsk and civilians injured. We regret the lack of progress on humanitarian mine action and deplore laying of dozens of new mines as reported by the SMM. We echo Chief Monitor Apakan who highlighted in his letter of 7 March 2019 to the signatories of the Minsk agreements, that mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) continue to pose a threat to civilians and the SMM. We condemn the military-style parades that took place in the areas of Donbas controlled by Russia-backed armed formations in particular as this was marked by high concentration of Minsk-proscribed weapons as reported by the SMM. We stress that lasting ceasefire, withdrawal of heavy weapons, disengagement of forces and comprehensive demining are important steps toward a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Mr. Chairman, the SMM must have safe, secure and unhindered access throughout Ukraine. This includes the illegally annexed Crimean peninsula and

the Ukraine-Russia state border to which the SMM is systematically denied access. We deplore any impediments to the SMM's work, including restrictions to its freedom of movement occurring predominantly in areas controlled by Russia-backed armed formations. We are concerned about the outgoing fire, despite security guarantees provided, near the Donetsk Filtration Station reported yesterday by an SMM patrol. We reiterate our utmost concern over the systematic restrictions to the SMM's access to areas of Southern Donetsk and the uncontrolled state border with Russia by Russia-backed armed formations, which create blind spots for the SMM and prevent us from receiving an accurate picture of the situation on the ground. We condemn the continued targeting and jamming of the SMM's technical assets, including mini and mid-range UAVs. We are concerned about the losses of 3 long-range UAVs since October 2018. Those responsible for any wilful damage, destruction or loss of SMM UAVs and other assets should be held accountable, both politically and financially.

Our position on the unjustified use of force by Russia near the Kerch Strait on 25 November 2018, its negative impact in the Black and Azov Seas and Russia's violations of international law is well known. We reiterate our strong call on Russia to release all the crew members and return their vessels unconditionally and without delay. We expect Russia to ensure unhindered and free passage through the Kerch Strait to and from the Azov Sea, in accordance with international law. The increasing militarisation of Crimea continues to impact negatively the security situation in the Black Sea region. We note with concern information provided to the SMM by the Deputy Mayor of Berdiansk that delays to shipping travelling through the Kerch Strait in 2018 had led to a significant gap in the city's budget. We encourage the SMM to continue its monitoring and reporting on the situation in the coastal area of the Sea of Azov.

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 information on 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 NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

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