



EUROPEAN UNION

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EU Statement on “Armed forces and Environment”

The European Union and its Member States commend the Belgian FSC Chair for the pertinent choice of putting the critical topic of the linkages between environment and security on the Forum’s agenda. We also thank all the speakers for their valuable contributions to the discussion.

Mr. Chair, in Helsinki 1975, the participating States already acknowledged that the protection and improvement of the environment is in the interest of present and future generations. Moreover, it was stated that cooperation in the field of the environment contributes to the reinforcement of peace and security in Europe and globally. The environmental concerns and the challenges identified decades ago as well as the issue of liability are now more pressing than ever. The Stockholm Ministerial decision in the field of climate change, the first that specifically addresses climate change and its related security challenges, mirrors such development. For its part, the United Nations have also emphasized the relevance of protecting the environment at all times, including during armed conflicts and in post-conflict recovery periods.

Environmental issues have cross-cutting impacts, and therefore definitely have also a place in the politico-military dimension. Accordingly, the first step in raising awareness is to follow through on today’s Security Dialogue and make this subject a regular topic of discussion. Two areas for discussion were proposed for today’s debate: the environmental “bootprint” of the armed forces and their impact during conflict situations.

Mr. Chair, the negative consequences of reckless military actions are currently felt nowhere more acutely than in Ukraine. The war of aggression waged by the Russian Federation continues to claim a heavy toll in human lives, but also in environmental damage, which has a transnational dimension, including for Russia, and has

immediate and long-term consequences for human health, ecosystems and the economy. The full extent of environmental damage is still difficult to assess. Here we refer, for instance, to remnants of war but also to the greenhouse gas emissions, and to the pollution of soils, air and water due to the constant shelling. According to the Ukrainian authorities, about 2.000 cases of environmental damage have been recorded to date and their costs are estimated to be €37.3 billion. The OSCE can play a role in the future, alleviating the devastating human health and environmental impacts of this war, including from the pol-mil perspective. This is already provided for in the OSCE *acquis*. For instance, the OSCE Document on Stockpiles of Conventional Ammunition has an explicit reference to environmental issues.

In Ukraine, it is particularly appalling that environmental degradation also stems from direct and deliberate targeting of critical civilian infrastructure such as dams or power generation facilities. Such acts are a blatant violation of International Humanitarian Law. IHL has rules protecting the natural environment and limiting the adverse consequences and damage caused by armed conflict. Acknowledgement and compliance with those rules are paramount. Nonetheless, the only way Russia can prevent further human and environmental harm is to cease altogether its military attack against Ukraine and withdraw all its forces from the entire territory of Ukraine.

Russia's actions pose serious and direct threats to the safety and security of Ukrainian nuclear facilities. The attacks of Russian armed forces at and near those facilities significantly increase the risk of a nuclear incident or accident, with potentially severe adverse consequences for human health and to the environment, both locally and globally. This behaviour must stop.

Devastating consequences of this war for the environment are unequivocal. However, the severity of these consequences becomes even greater and more worrying if we consider that this conflict is undermining all efforts made for a green and sustainable economy in Ukraine, as well as all mitigation undertaken so far addressing the global challenge of climate change, which requires urgent and priority action.

Mr. Chair, environment and climate change are two deeply intertwined topics. The EU was one of the first to identify climate change as a security issue. For more than a decade, we have considered climate change and environmental degradation as an existential threat multiplier that needs to be at the centre of our security policy and the global agenda. We thus would like to share some of our experience in addressing the

environment's impact on our common defence endeavours, including the subject of environmental "bootprint".

With the European Green Deal, the European Union aims to turn climate-neutral by 2050 and, at the same time, foster a sustainable and inclusive economy. Under the Green Deal Umbrella we count the 2020 Climate Change and Defence Roadmap. The Roadmap revolves around three different interlinked areas of action:

- Operational dimension – to enhance situational awareness, early warning and strategic foresight, as well as mainstreaming climate change and environmental aspects into the planning and implementation of CSDP missions and operations;
- Capability development – to focus on new challenges, such as ensuring that military equipment remains effective under extreme weather conditions and more energy efficient technologies for our missions and operations, reducing the carbon and environmental footprint of the defence sector;
- Diplomatic outreach – to seek cooperation and synergies with relevant partner organisations, including the UN and NATO, as well as partner countries since we are facing a challenge that requires a truly global approach.

Mr. Chair, today's topics of discussion are of the utmost relevance for multilateralism in our times and the OSCE has an important complementary role to play in the fight against climate change, environmental degradation and its impact on peace and stability. It is important that we, in the Organisation also take up this task, including in this Forum.

Thank you!

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, ALBANIA*, UKRAINE and REPUBLIC of MOLDOVA, the Potential Candidate Country GEORGIA, the EFTA countries NORWAY, ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area align themselves with this statement.

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