



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation N°956
Vienna, 30 September 2020**

EU Statement on the security situation in and around Ukraine

Madame Chair, the European Union and its Member States welcome the fact that the SMM continues to report on a relatively calm situation in the conflict zone, with a significantly lower level of ceasefire violations. It is important to maintain this positive trend and to avoid sliding back to high-intensity hostilities, which was still a sad reality not a long time ago. We once again urge the sides to comply with the commitments they have signed up to, and in particular with the additional measures to strengthen the ceasefire agreed on 22 July. A functioning coordination mechanism for responding to ceasefire violations is also of crucial importance.

A lasting comprehensive ceasefire, despite attempts to undermine it, is an important step towards achieving a sustainable truce that would enable the full implementation of the Minsk agreements. It is vital to find a political solution to the conflict in respect for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. We fully support continued international diplomatic efforts to this end within the Normandy format and the Trilateral Contact Group. In this context, we wish once again to commend Ukraine and President Zelenskyy for restraint and the constructive approach in the ongoing negotiations and call on Russia to act likewise.

The Special Monitoring Mission acts as international community's eyes and ears in the conflict area. It should have, in accordance with its mandate agreed by all 57 participating States, unhindered access to the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. Regrettably, it still continues to face consistent

denials of its freedom of movement, overwhelmingly in areas held by Russia-backed armed formations. The weekly report issued on 23 September, once again drew the same bleak picture: 18 restrictions of the Mission's freedom of movement and all but one in non-government-controlled areas.

We note with regret that in particular the Mission's access to the areas adjacent to the Ukraine-Russia State border outside the control of the Ukrainian government remains restricted. On three occasions, when Mission members attempted to visit border crossing points outside government control in Luhansk region, they were urged by the Russia-backed armed formations to leave the area. In this context, we would support possible measures to improve transparency on the Ukrainian-Russian border, including those proposed by the SMM.

We reiterate that all impediments to the SMM's work, including attempts to destroy SMM's assets, are unacceptable. Those responsible for any wilful damage, destruction or loss of SMM UAVs and other assets should be held accountable, both politically and financially. We urge Russia to use its considerable and undeniable influence over the armed formations it backs in order to remove all restrictions on the SMM and its assets.

We reiterate our concern about the presence of people inside the disengagement areas in Stanytsia Luhanska, Zolote and Petrivske, during evening and night hours, and note that that the SMM has still a very limited monitoring capability of the two latter areas due to restrictions imposed by the Russia-backed armed formations.

The continuing commitment to the ceasefire is also an opportunity to undertake further efforts in order to alleviate hardships faced by the civilian population. One obvious area of action, which we have already referred to many times in this forum, is the urgently needed de-mining. The other aspect is the repair and maintenance of civilian infrastructure in the areas in proximity of the contact line. In particular, it is fundamental to ensure that gas infrastructure is operational well ahead of winter. In this context, we particularly commend the SMM for regularly facilitating maintenance works through its monitoring activities and we encourage the Mission, in line with its

mandate, to further expand its work in this direction and we urge the sides to provide the necessary security guarantees.

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. We continue to call on Russia to ensure unhindered and free passage to and from the Sea of Azov in accordance with international law. We express our deep concern about the ongoing large-scale militarisation of the Crimean peninsula by Russia, which continues to impact the security situation in the Black Sea region and beyond.

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.

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