



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Permanent Council No. 1301 Vienna, 4 February 2021

#### **EU Statement in response to the Update by the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson in Office in Ukraine and in the Trilateral Contact Group, Ambassador Heidi Grau, and to the Report by the Chief Monitor of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, Ambassador Yaşar Halit Çevik**

Mr Chair, the European Union warmly welcomes Ambassador Yaşar Halit Çevik back to the Permanent Council. We regret the fact that Ambassador Heidi Grau could not join us today and hope to see her in the Permanent Council soon. We fully support your tireless efforts within the Trilateral Contact Group in order to achieve a lasting solution to this conflict and a sustainable peace in Ukraine. We appreciate the goodwill shown by Ukraine in these negotiations and urge the Russian Federation to assume its responsibility as a signatory of the Minsk agreements by acting constructively within the Trilateral Contact Group and the Normandy format.

Ambassador Çevik, we are grateful for your report. It is clear that the additional measures to strengthen the ceasefire agreed in the TCG in July 2020 represented an undeniable breakthrough and a tangible improvement of the security situation. However, we are concerned about the increase in the number of ceasefire violations since November and the newly-constructed trenches. We also note with concern the continued violations of the Minsk agreements regarding the withdrawal of heavy weapons where 91% occurred in the non-government controlled areas.

These developments demonstrate the fragility of the situation and pose an increased risk to the local population on both sides of the contact line. We urge the sides to respect the ceasefire in order to create an enabling security environment to move forward with the implementation of the Minsk agreements.

As we read in your report, Ambassador Çevik, civilians continue to carry a heavy burden as they have to cope with the Covid-19 pandemic while enduring the hardship of having to struggle with an artificial boundary in their country. Their freedom of movement has been severely reduced due to the restrictions in crossing the line of contact. As a result, hundreds of thousands of civilians are separated from family members and cut off from their livelihood, pensions, medical care and other services. We are very concerned by the numerous reports of civilians forced to spend the night in hazardous conditions at the EECPs or being prevented from crossing due to administrative hurdles. Most of the elderly civilians who regularly cross the contact line in order to collect their pensions are women. We urge the Russian Federation to implement its commitments made at the Normandy Summit in Paris as well as in the TCG, by using its considerable influence over the armed formations it backs in order to ensure that the Shchastia and Zolote EECPs can become fully operational, and that all the currently closed EECPs are reopened without further delay.

We are also concerned that the SMM's freedom of movement was restricted on 90 occasions during this reporting period, despite the fact that all signatories of the Minsk agreements, including Russia, have agreed on the need to ensure the SMM safe and secure access to the entire territory of Ukraine, including Crimea. 94% of these restrictions occurred in the non-government controlled areas and, in most cases, members of the Russia-backed armed formations denied the SMM to cross the contact line. It is regrettable that the impediments faced by the Mission have significantly affected its operational posture and that the restrictions imposed against the backdrop of the pandemic have, in effect, artificially divided the SMM into three separate units. We urge Russia to use its considerable influence over the armed formations it backs in order to make sure that all undue restrictions on the SMM are removed.

We regret that the Mission's ability to monitor certain areas, such as the Petrivske disengagement area and areas near the uncontrolled segment of the Ukraine-Russia State border, is seriously hampered, including by damage to cameras or signal interference targeting the SMM's UAVs. We underscore that those responsible for any wilful damage, destruction or loss of SMM assets should be held accountable, both politically and financially.

We welcome the Mission's continued monitoring on issues pertaining to gender equality as well as the implementation of the UNSCR 1325 on women, peace and security, including the meaningful participation of women in conflict resolution. Nonetheless, we regret the fact that the Covid-19 pandemic and the overall political dynamics are having a negative impact upon women's ability to participate in peace-building activities and in public life in general. Representatives from civil society report an increased burden of care responsibilities for women in particular. In addition, it is concerning that the reduced in-person interactions and a shrunken space for dialogue hamper possibilities for confidence-building measures in order to move towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

We hope that the stumbling blocks within the TCG will resolve soon, so that we can achieve progress on important areas such as agreeing on an updated demining plan, new disengagement areas and another release and exchange of conflict-related detainees. Dear ambassador, please convey our deep appreciation to your staff who are doing an excellent job. We would also like to welcome Ambassador Herbert Salber as the new coordinator for the Economic Working Group and to thank Ambassador Ulrich Brandenburg for his dedicated work and engagement to find solutions for serious issues affecting the civilian population on both sides of the contact line.

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 the 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 the presence of Russian military equipment and personnel in areas held by Russia-backed armed formations. The duration of the European Union's 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 REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\* and ALBANIA\*, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, as well as the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

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