



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Permanent Council No. 1365 Vienna, 31 March 2022

#### **EU Statement on the Russian Federation's ongoing aggression against Ukraine**

1. Mr Chair, we are five weeks into Russia's war of aggression against its peaceful and democratic neighbour, Ukraine, and Russia continues unabated in its horrendous attacks against Ukraine's civilian population and infrastructure. There are deeply disturbing reports, including from OHCHR, of cluster munitions being used in populated areas. The Russian Armed Forces have besieged Mariupol and other Ukrainian cities and are denying humanitarian access to these areas. Those trying to leave the besieged cities are being targeted, while schools, hospitals, and residential buildings are being continuously shelled. People are left without water, food, medicines, heating or electricity. The Russian Armed Forces are also forcibly deporting Mariupol residents to Russia.
2. The European Union condemns Russia's premeditated, unprovoked, unjustified and brutal war of aggression against Ukraine in the strongest possible terms. We demand that Russia immediately and unconditionally cease its military actions and withdraw all its troops from the entire territory of Ukraine. Russia must also urgently provide safe pathways, both for civilians to evacuate to other parts of Ukraine, as well as for those delivering humanitarian assistance. The wider international community also supports this stance. Last Thursday, a resolution on the dire humanitarian consequences of Russia's aggression against Ukraine was adopted in the UN General Assembly with overwhelming support with votes of 140 countries in favour and only 5 against. We also reiterate our call on the co-aggressor, Belarus, to stop enabling the Russian aggression and to abide by its international obligations.

3. Mr Chair, deliberate attacks directed against civilians are war crimes under international humanitarian law. There is *prima facie* evidence of the Russian Armed Forces' indiscriminate attacks in densely populated areas as well as on civilian infrastructure. In this regard, we heard moving testimonies from brave representatives of civil society from Ukraine or working in Ukraine, during the First Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting. The EU supports efforts by international bodies, including the OSCE, in the gathering of evidence and documentation of the atrocities of the war inflicted by Russia, and we welcome the tireless efforts and contributions of civil society and human rights defenders to this end. We will spare no effort to hold President Putin, the other architects of this aggression, as well as their executors on the ground, accountable for their actions.
4. We also recall Russia's obligations under the international treaties regarding chemical, biological and nuclear weapons. In this regard, we categorically denounce Russia's unfounded disinformation campaign against Ukraine, a state in full compliance with international non-proliferation agreements. In the event of a biological or chemical incident, Russia would bear full responsibility. In addition, we will also continue our efforts to support Ukraine in defending its networks against cyber incidents, including by holding those actors that engage in destructive, disruptive, or destabilising activities in cyberspace to account.
5. To date, the EU and its Member States have welcomed almost four million Ukrainians fleeing the violence, providing them food, shelter, access to health services, education and the labour market. We are also grateful to the Republic of Moldova for all its efforts. We are paying particular attention to the plight of children and will continue to do our utmost to provide them protection and ensure their rights. In addition, we are taking action to address other global negative consequences of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, in particular the Russian targeting of oil and grain storages, which are putting the lives and livelihoods of millions of people at risk. These cynical acts increase the burden on the Ukrainian people, result in a global commodity price boom and have severe consequences on global food security. We are also committed to providing support to Ukraine for its immediate humanitarian needs and, once the Russian onslaught has ceased, for the reconstruction of a

democratic Ukraine through a Ukraine Solidarity Trust Fund, in which international partners will be invited to participate.

6. The humanitarian catastrophe on the ground inflicted by Russia's war against Ukraine requires urgent actions. We support all efforts of the OSCE Chairmanship, the OSCE executive structures and autonomous institutions in order to assist the people of Ukraine, including through the coordination and facilitation of humanitarian assistance and the support to safe pathways and humanitarian convoys. The same applies for the assessment of the human rights and humanitarian impacts of Russia's invasion.
7. Mr Chair, we continue to strongly condemn Russia's illegal annexation of the Crimean peninsula in 2014 and its recent recognition of the illegal self-proclaimed entities in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine. Any attempt by Russia to create illegitimate alternative administrative structures in Ukraine will be considered null and void. In this context, we condemn the conscription campaign of Crimean residents to be launched tomorrow, as well as previous campaigns, as they are another violation of international humanitarian law.
8. Russia is attacking Ukraine's statehood, including its democratically elected government. We have already seen examples of how democratic principles eroded where Russia has interfered in past years, including in the Crimean peninsula, where political opposition is stifled and persecuted, civil society curbed, journalists silenced and the rights of persons belonging to different communities, in particular Crimean Tatars, suppressed.
9. Moreover, Russia's external aggression is mirrored by increasing internal repression. We deplore a *de facto* media censorship imposed by Russian authorities coupled with the manipulation and disinformation of Russian audiences by state-controlled outlets in the context of Russia's unprovoked and unjustified war against Ukraine. This censorship has wiped out media freedom in Russia, as the RFoM recently pointed out. The Roskomnadzor's warning to Russian outlets not to publicise the interview organised by four Russian journalists with the Ukrainian President on 27 March is a clear example of the suppression of media freedom.

10. Furthermore, the recent amendments in the legislation in Russia have drastically compromised the safety of journalists, as correspondents face the prospect of yearlong prison sentences for reporting facts about President Putin's war against Ukraine. Due to these censorship rules and following years of systematic intimidation by Russian authorities, the independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta has been forced to suspend its activities. Nevertheless, the wave of resignations of journalists in the Russian state media testify that many journalists and others share a fundamental disagreement with the official policy.
11. We deplore the decision of the Russian Supreme Court on 22 March to reject the appeal of Memorial to reverse its forced closure. Memorial's tireless advocacy for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Russia has never been more needed. In addition, we praise the courage of the Russian human rights defenders and activists who have established the Council of Russian Human Rights Defenders and signed the manifesto denouncing Russia's ongoing pretextual "military operation" in Ukraine.
12. The European Union reiterates its unwavering support and commitment to Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders and territorial waters. Ukraine, as any sovereign State, has the inherent right to choose its own future and destiny. The EU resolutely supports Ukraine's inherent right to self-defence, and the Ukrainian Armed Forces' efforts to defend Ukraine's territorial integrity and population in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter. We stand by the people of Ukraine as well as the representatives of its democratically elected institutions in these dark hours.

I kindly ask that this Statement be appended to the Journal of the Day.

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, GEORGIA, MONACO, 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.