



## EUROPEAN UNION

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### EU Statement on Russia's ongoing military aggression against Ukraine

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Mr. Chair, the **European Union** and its **Member States** condemn **President Putin's premeditated, unprovoked, unjustified and brutal invasion of an independent and sovereign State** in the strongest possible terms. This is an **illegal war of aggression launched by Russia**, which must stop immediately. **The EU and its Member States stand with Ukraine.** This **message of support** was also **conveyed** by the **prime ministers of three EU Members States**, the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovenia, who, in a sign of European solidarity, went yesterday to Kyiv **to meet President Zelensky and Prime Minister Shmyhal.**

Until three weeks ago, Russian representatives kept stating week after week, also in this Forum, that **there would be no invasion of Ukraine.** The reality is cruel today. **Russia has lied.** It has blatantly violated international law and the core principles on which the international rules-based order is built, including the UN Charter, the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris.

After the invasion started, we witnessed increasingly desperate **attempts by Russia to justify the unjustifiable with false claims.** Last week we heard allegations **about biological labs and chemical weapons** in Ukraine. In the current situation, disinformation about biological and chemical weapons is irresponsible and must be considered a provocation. The use of chemical and biological weapons anywhere, at any time, by anyone and under any circumstances is unacceptable and contravenes the provisions of international law prohibiting the

use of such weapons. **In the event of a biological or chemical incident, Russia alone would bear responsibility.**

Such allegations are completely contrary to the facts and realities. **There are no indications whatsoever of Ukraine not fulfilling its non-proliferation obligations.** Moreover, the OSCE has played an important role in supporting Ukraine in the implementation of UNSCR 1540. The EU has also been contributing to this objective, by financing inter alia a specific OSCE project on biosecurity and biosafety which is still ongoing. One of the strands of this project provided support to the “Institute of Experimental and Veterinary Medicine” in Kharkiv. However, it was Russia’s brutal shelling of Kharkiv that brought this project to a sudden halt.

Mr. Chair, we are facing a Russian-made tragedy in Ukraine. Every day reconfirms **how senseless and inhuman this war of aggression is.** We have been witnessing **appalling scenes** from besieged Ukrainian cities, like Mariupol, Sumy, Kharkiv or the almost completely destroyed Volnovakha. Russian artillery and airstrikes continue to devastate entire parts of the cities and to destroy the vital civilian infrastructure. Civilians are left without access to food, water and medication, without heating and electricity. Hospitals are overcrowded. Journalists are also being targeted and killed. **Indiscriminate attacks endangering civilians,** including with the **use of cluster munitions, thermobaric bombs** and now, as reported, also **white phosphorus bombs** in populated areas, **are prohibited by international law and may amount to war crimes.** Last week the world was in utter shock when Russian forces shelled a maternity hospital in Mariupol. The Russian propaganda tried again to dismiss this heinous attack as fake news. Sadly, in the meantime we have learnt that the pregnant woman on the stretcher photographed on that day and her unborn baby have died as a result of this barbaric attack.

We also continue to be alarmed by the **dangerous and irresponsible behaviour** of the Russian armed forces near the **nuclear power plants in Ukraine**. This is a serious threat to safety and health of all the people in Ukraine, Russia and the whole of Europe.

The Russian delegation regularly reminds us of the mandate of this very forum. Well, allow me some remarks in this regard: Together with many others we have often drawn attention to Russia's blatant disregard of its commitments under the Vienna Document. In the context of massive violations of international humanitarian law **we also wonder how Russia approaches its commitments under the Code of Conduct**. Its paragraphs 29 and 30 make training in international humanitarian law a basic requirement for the members of the armed forces. The reality on the ground **shows that either these clear provisions of the Code of Conduct were ignored** in training – or, even worse, that Russia is unwilling to implement them in letter and spirit.

Paragraph 31 of the Code of Conduct calls on the pS to ensure that “**armed forces personnel** vested with command authority **are made aware that they can be held individually accountable for the unlawful exercise** of such authority and that orders contrary to national and international law must not be given. The responsibility of superiors does not exempt subordinates from any of their individual responsibilities.” Let me repeat: “**the responsibility of superiors does not exempt subordinates from any of their individual responsibilities**”.

Mr. Chair, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, with the complicit participation of Lukashenka's regime, started on 24 February. However, the aggression against Ukraine began much earlier. **More than eight years ago Russia covertly used its military to seize Ukrainian territory by force** and then **attempted to give its actions a veneer of legitimacy with a so-called “referendum” in Crimea**. This referendum, exactly eight years ago today, conducted through the barrel of a

**gun can never be regarded as legitimate.** We do not and will not recognise this illegal land grab of the territory of a sovereign State. Crimea is Ukraine.

Since the illegal annexation, people living on the peninsula have experienced severe restrictions to their human rights and fundamental freedoms. Political opposition in Crimea has been stifled and persecuted, civil society curbed, journalists silenced and the rights of persons belonging to different communities, in particular Crimean Tatars have been suppressed.

We know the Kremlin playbook. Hence, **we strongly condemn the kidnapping of the mayors of Melitopol and Dniprorudne** by Russian occupying forces and **demand their immediate release.** Attempts to establish alternative local government structures are illegal and such structures illegitimate.

Mr. Chair, two weeks ago at the Annual Implementation Assessment Meeting of the Vienna Document the Head of the Russian delegation mentioned the importance of **looking ahead to the future** and of strengthening the implementation of the existing agreements. This was a really **disturbing choice of words** when the **leadership of his country is determined not only to revive dangerous myths of an imperialistic history, but to actively drag its own population many decades back to dark years of the past.**

This war of President Putin is an unspeakable tragedy for Ukraine, but it is also a catastrophe for Russia and its people. **We commend those in Russia who do not hesitate to protest** against this unwarranted aggression against their neighbour, **who continue to tell the truth and fight disinformation.**

In conclusion, we reiterate our firm demand on Russia **to stop this war of aggression.** The sooner, the better for all. We stand with Ukraine.

Thank you!

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, 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.