

PRESS RELEASE

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Ukraine: Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the European Union on the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol

Seven years on from the violent, illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol by the Russian Federation, the European Union remains steadfast in its commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders.

The European Union reiterates that it does not recognise and continues to condemn this violation of international law. It remains a direct challenge to international security, with grave implications for the international legal order that protects the territorial integrity, unity and sovereignty of all States.

The European Union remains committed to fully implementing its non-recognition policy, including through restrictive measures and cooperation in international fora. The European Union calls again on UN Member States to consider similar non-recognition measures in line with the UN General Assembly Resolution 68/262 of 27 March 2014. The European Union does not and will not recognise the holding of elections by the Russian Federation in the Crimean peninsula.

The increasing militarisation of the peninsula by the Russian Federation, including multiple military exercises and the construction of warships, continues to have a negative impact on the security situation in the Black Sea region. In violation of international humanitarian law, Russia has imposed citizenship and conscription into its armed forces on Crimean residents. In accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 75/29 of 7 December 2020, the European Union recalls the negative effects of the illegal annexation on regional stability, as shown by the unjustified use of military force by Russia against Ukraine on 25 November 2018. Furthermore, the Russian Federation should stop changing the demographic structure on the peninsula by the resettlement of its own civilian population to the peninsula.

The European Union condemns the construction of the Kerch Bridge and the opening of a railway section without Ukraine's consent. These constitute further attempts to forcibly integrate the illegally annexed peninsula into Russia, and a further violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The EU expects Russia to ensure unhindered and free passage of all ships through the Kerch Strait to and from the Azov Sea, in accordance with international law. The illegal restrictions to such passage are ongoing and have negative economic consequences for Ukraine's ports in the Azov Sea, as well as for the region as a whole.

Since the illegal annexation by the Russian Federation, the human rights situation in the Crimean peninsula has significantly deteriorated. Having in mind the landmark decision of the European Court of Human Rights of 14 January 2021, the European Union calls for Russia's full compliance with international humanitarian law, international human rights standards, and relevant UN General Assembly Resolutions, including 75/192 of 16 December 2020. Residents of the peninsula face systematic restrictions of their fundamental freedoms, such as the freedoms of expression, religion or belief and association, and the right to peaceful assembly. Journalists, human rights defenders and defence lawyers face interference and intimidation in their work. The Crimean Tatars continue to be unacceptably persecuted, pressured and have their rights gravely violated. Crimean Tatars, Ukrainians and all ethnic and religious communities in the peninsula must be ensured the possibility to maintain and develop their culture, education, identity and cultural heritage traditions, which are currently threatened by the illegal annexation. Destructive actions against the peninsula's cultural heritage, such as archaeological treasures, artworks, museums or historical sites, which continue unabated, must stop.

In accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 75/192 of 16 December 2020, it is crucial that regional and international human rights monitoring mechanisms as well as non-governmental human rights organisations have unimpeded access to Crimea and Sevastopol. All pending cases of human rights violations and abuses, such as enforced disappearances, torture and killings, violence, politically motivated prosecutions, discrimination and harassment must be thoroughly investigated. All those detained in the Crimean peninsula and sentenced in breach of international law, including Emir-Usein Kuku and his five co-defendants, Oleh Prykhodko, the recently sentenced Enver Omerov, Riza Omerov and Ayder Dzhapparov, must be immediately released. The ban on the activities of the Mejlis, a self-governing body of the Crimean Tatars, must be reversed. Russia must also take measures to

improve the environmental situation, which has considerably worsened since the illegal annexation.

The EU welcomes the diplomatic efforts aimed at restoring Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders and will consider concrete Ukrainian ideas in this regard, in line with the established non-recognition policy.

This Declaration is issued on the 7th anniversary of the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol by the Russian Federation, commemorated by Ukraine on 26 February 2021.

The Candidate Countries the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania¹⁾, the EFTA countries Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia align themselves with this declaration.

¹⁾The Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

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