

Mr President,

I thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Ms. Rosemary DICARLO, and the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Mr. Lamberto ZANNIER, for their informative briefings.

Mr President,

The people of Ukraine have just elected a new President, Mr. Volodymyr Zelensky, following a democratic electoral process. Outgoing President Poroshenko has ensured a constructive transition. These are two important achievements in a complex political, economic and security environment. Furthermore, Mr. Zelensky expressed an openness towards the entire Ukrainian population, including those in areas that are not under government control. In recent days, Mr. Zelensky has reached out to the Russian government in order to organise consultations. Belgium encourages Russia to constructively engage with the new President and we call on the Russian authorities to consider this political development in Ukraine as an opportunity not to be missed.

Mr President,

The implementation of the Minsk Agreements is the only way to reach a lasting political solution to this conflict. For example, it would be appropriate for Ukraine to fully take into account the recommendations of the Venice Commission on the law on education, in accordance with its commitment, and for the law on the use of languages to be based on the obligations of the Minsk Agreements. We therefore expect all parties to refrain from unilateral measures which are likely to heighten tensions, to quickly and fully implement these Agreements, and to honour their commitments.

All actors must respect the ceasefire and respect international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians and civilian structures. They have a responsibility to improve humanitarian access by ensuring the security of humanitarian workers and by lifting bureaucratic obstacles. The parties must ensure the freedom of movement of OSCE monitors throughout Ukraine, including along the Ukraine-Russia border and in Crimea. We are particularly concerned by the fact that the technical instruments of the OSCE mission are constantly being targeted and blocked.

I take this opportunity to reaffirm our unwavering commitment to the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders.

We reiterate our support for the efforts of the Trilateral Contact Group, the OSCE and the Normandy format.

We hope that the new President will continue on the path of the political and economic reforms which Ukraine needs, particularly in the framework of the implementation of the Association

Agreement with the European Union. Belgium will continue to offer its support to this process, and to the Ukrainian people.

Mr President,

We reiterate our gravest concern at the escalation in the Kerch Strait and Sea of Azov, and violations of international law by Russia. In this regard, we regret that Russia has not yet complied with the decision of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, which dates back to 25 May. We call on Russia to respect this legally binding decision, and to immediately release the 24 servicemen captured in November 2018 as well as the three vessels, the "Berdyansk", the "Nikopol" and the "Yana Kapu".

We condemn any obstruction of navigation and freedom of passage through the Kerch Strait. The militarisation of Crimea and any illegal use of force run the risk of further destabilising the region and increasing tensions. We urge Russia to guarantee free and unhindered passage through the Sea of Azov, in accordance with international maritime law.

Mr President,

Tomorrow will mark 5 years since Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 was shot down over Ukraine. This tragic event claimed the lives of 298 people, including several Belgians. The Joint Investigation Team (JIT), of which Belgium is a member, recently published the names of four suspects allegedly involved. Their identification does not put an end to the investigation and Belgium continues to call on all countries to cooperate in accordance with resolution 2166 of the Security Council, so that all those responsible can be prosecuted, and for justice to be done independently, honestly and in a transparent manner for the victims and their families.

I thank you.