



**STATEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
BY H.E. AMBASSADOR GUDRUN LINGNER
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF GERMANY TO THE OPCW
AT THE 95th SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL
(The Hague, 6-9 2020)**

Mr. Chairperson,
Mr. Director-General,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the European Union (EU).

The Candidate Countries Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Turkey, the potential candidate country Bosnia and Herzegovina and the EFTA (European Free Trade Association) countries Iceland and Norway, members of the EEA (European Economic Area) as well as Georgia and Ukraine, align themselves with this statement. Andorra, Monaco and San Marino also associate themselves with this statement.

Mr Chairperson,

The European Union would like to thank you for guiding the preparatory work for this 95th Session of the Executive Council in an effective and transparent manner under continued exceptional circumstances. You have played a key role together with the Bureau members and the Technical Secretariat in ensuring continuity in the work of the Council. We are also grateful to all the facilitators for their efforts in taking issues forward.

We take this opportunity to thank the OPCW Director General Ambassador Fernando Arias and his staff for their efforts with a view to ensuring the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) in spite of challenges caused by the outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). We commend the Director-General for his efforts from the beginning of his tenure to improve gender balance and geographical distribution of positions within the Technical Secretariat. We encourage him to continue these efforts with a view to ensuring a more diverse and representative Technical Secretariat as well as to strengthening training and knowledge management to mitigate effects of rotation.

Mr Chairperson,

The use of chemical weapons by anyone – be it a State or a non-State actor – anywhere, at any time and under any circumstances is a violation of international law and can amount to the most serious crimes of international concern - war crimes and crimes against humanity. The re-emergence of chemical weapons is one of the most urgent threats to international peace and security and has to be dealt with firmly and collectively. The European Union urges all States Parties to live up to their responsibility to protect the integrity of the Convention, a key instrument of the international non-proliferation and disarmament regime, and to uphold the global chemical weapons non-use norm.

The European Union condemns in the strongest possible terms the assassination attempt on Alexei Navalny, who was poisoned in Russia by a military chemical nerve agent of the “Novichok” group, as has been confirmed by three independent specialised laboratories from Germany, France and Sweden. The EU welcomes the German request for technical assistance from the OPCW Technical Secretariat.

The European Union calls for a resolute joint international response and reserves the right to take appropriate action.

The latest assassination attempt in which a chemical weapon was used against a Russian citizen took place on the territory of the Russian Federation. The Russian government must do its utmost to disclose the circumstances of this crime in full transparency and bring those responsible to justice. Impunity for the use of chemical weapons must not and will not be tolerated. The European Union calls upon the Russian Federation to fully cooperate with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to ensure an impartial international investigation.

The European Union will continue to closely follow the issue and consider its implications in the OPCW as well as in a wider international context.

Mr Chairperson,

The European Union strongly condemns the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Air Force as concluded by the first report of the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) to the OPCW Executive Council and to the Secretary General of the United Nations on 8 April 2020.

In response to the findings of the IIT report, the Executive Council in July 2020 (EC-94) took a crucially important decision on addressing the possession and use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic (EC-94/DEC.2 of 9 July 2020). This decision was carefully drafted in accordance with the Convention. It sets clear and verifiable parameters for action that the Syrian Arab Republic needs to take in order to return to full compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The European Union looks forward to the OPCW Technical Secretariat report on the response given by the Syrian Arab Republic. The European Union strongly supports the Decision and urges the Syrian Arab Republic to take all the measures required to redress the situation in the specified timeframe. As set out in the Decision, it will be upon the Conference of the States Parties to consider action, in accordance with Art XII of the Convention.

Impunity for these heinous acts will not be tolerated. The European Union has already imposed restrictive measures on high level Syrian officials, scientists and entities for their role in the development and use of chemical weapons. We are ready to consider introducing further measures as appropriate. The European Union will continue to work towards ensuring accountability for those responsible for these egregious crimes on national as well as international levels. The European Union also continues to demonstrate its commitment through the Partnership Against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons.

We reiterate our full confidence in the technical expertise, objectivity, impartiality and independence of the OPCW Technical Secretariat and its Investigation and Identification Team, and look forward to the publication of its next report.

Mr. Chairperson,

The Chemical Weapons Convention is a key instrument of the global non-proliferation architecture. It requires a predictable and solid financial base to reach a world free of chemical weapons. The Director-General's proposed programme and budget 2021 is proportionate and justified. It maintains the level of assessed contributions for all States Parties. The budget will enable the OPCW to continue its vital work throughout 2021, including cooperation and assistance projects. The European Union urges all members of the Executive Council to support the submission of the Director-General's draft budget to the Conference of States Parties. A timely decision is needed as the current budget expires in December 2020.

A successful transformation of the OPCW laboratory into a Centre for Chemistry and Technology (CCT) will be key to enhancing the Organisation's capacity to perform its core tasks in verification, inspection and capacity building. An important number of States Parties have committed voluntary funding to the establishment of the "ChemTechCentre". The European Union has made a substantial voluntary contribution to this project amounting to EUR 8,1 million. This does not include additional voluntary contributions made by EU Member States in their national capacity. We would like to recognise the Technical Secretariat's efforts in keeping the "ChemTechCentre" –project on track despite the exceptional circumstances. We call on all States Parties to support and contribute to this project which will benefit all States Parties.

Mr Chairperson,

The impact of COVID-19 on the implementation of the CWC, including verification and international cooperation and assistance as well as on the functioning of the Policy Making Organs, needs to be thoroughly analysed. This should be informed by lessons learnt and best practices identified, including those of other relevant international organisations, also with a view to provide general guidance for other unforeseen circumstances. The aim should be to allow the OPCW to exercise its key activities - notably convening sessions or meetings of the Executive Council, in case that extraordinary circumstances occur - be it at another venue in The Hague or remotely, by using virtual meeting technology. The European Union values the ongoing reflection exercise in this regard.

Mr. Chairperson,

The European Union reiterates its full support to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and underlines the complementarity of its work with that of the United Nations. In this context, the European Union appreciates the regular sharing of information of the OPCW activities and investigations with the United Nations Secretary-general and the UN Security Council.

Finally, I would like to reiterate the importance of engaging all relevant stakeholders, ranging from chemical industry to think tanks, civil society organisations and NGOs, to the OPCW work, also during these exceptional circumstances. In this spirit, The European Union encourages to find ways and means for ensuring their meaningful participation in the November Conference of States Parties.

I would kindly ask you to consider this statement as an official document and post it on the OPCW External Server and public website.

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