



STATEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
BY H.E. AMBASSADOR LUIS VASSY
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF FRANCE TO THE OPCW
AT THE 99th SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL
(The Hague, 8-11 March 2022)

Agenda item 6 – General debate

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

The Candidate Countries Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Turkey, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the EFTA (European Free Trade Association) countries Iceland, Liechtenstein 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.

Mrs. Chairperson,

The 99th session of the Executive council opens in the context of ones of the darkest hours for Europe since World War II. The European Union condemns in the strongest possible terms the Russian Federation's unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine. By its illegal military actions, Russia is grossly violating international law and the principles of the UN Charter and undermining European and global security and stability. Russia bears full responsibility for this act of aggression and all the destruction and loss of life it will cause. It will be held accountable for its actions. The European Union demands that Russia immediately ceases its military actions, unconditionally withdraws all forces and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine and fully respects Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence within its internationally recognised borders. In this context, the European Union wishes to denounce unfounded statements by Russian officials on allegations to commit provocations with chemical components in Ukraine.

The European Union (EU) extends its warm thanks to the Chairperson, H.E. Ambassador Abdelouahab Bellouki of Morocco, for his dedication and successful tenure as Chair of the Executive Council under challenging circumstances. We wish him all the best in his new responsibilities. The European Union would also like to thank Ambassador Gudrun Lingner of Germany, Vice-Chairperson of the Executive Council, for ensuring continuity and guiding the preparatory work for the 99th Session in an effective manner. I would also like to express our gratitude to all of the facilitators for their efforts in taking issues forward in their respective areas.

The European Union reiterates its full confidence in the OPCW Technical Secretariat, including its professionalism, impartiality, and its well-established technical expertise in implementing the Convention and tasks assigned to it by the States Parties. It is my pleasure to inform the Executive Council that the European Union has decided to make a further contribution of EUR 1,6 million in support of the OPCW's activities. This concrete assistance is dedicated to enhancing OPCW operational effectiveness through satellite imagery.

The European Union underlines the complementarity of the efforts and cooperation between the OPCW and the United Nations. We appreciate the regular sharing of information of the OPCW activities and investigations with the United Nations Secretary-General, as well as the Director-General's briefings to the UN Security Council. We remain steadfast in defending the OPCW against attacks on its integrity and credibility through deliberate campaigns of state-sponsored disinformation.

Mrs. Chairperson,

The 29th of April 2022 will mark the 25th Anniversary of the entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention. The European Union welcomes the successful and verified destruction of 99% of the chemical weapons stockpiles declared by possessor States. Despite of the progress made in this regard, the re-emergence of use of chemical weapons is one of the most urgent threats to international peace and security. The Fifth Review Conference will be an opportunity to consider how to ensure the continued relevance of the Convention as a key instrument of the international non-proliferation and disarmament regime. In this regard, the European Union and its Member States will contribute actively and constructively to the work

of the Open Ended Working Group (OEWG). Achieving a common vision on countering the re-emergence of chemical weapons and safeguarding the global non-use norm is a shared responsibility between all States Parties.

Mrs. Chairperson,

The Decision adopted by the 25th Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention suspending the voting rights and privileges of the Syrian Arab Republic due to Syria's failure to comply with the Convention is a strong message by the international community against impunity for the use of chemical weapons, and in defence of International Law, including International Humanitarian Law.

The European Union welcomes the Decision and considers it an appropriate response by the Conference to the clear violation by the Syrian Arab Republic of the Convention and its core principles. This Decision comes more than eight years after the adoption of the United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 (2013) and is a consequence of the continued failure of Syria to fully declare and destroy its chemical weapons programme. In order to reverse the decision, Syria needs to resolve the pending issues, declare the full extent of its chemical weapons programme, and return to full compliance with the Convention.

The Syrian regime's failure to respect its international obligations under the Convention is substantiated through comprehensive and thorough investigations carried out by the Joint UN – OPCW Investigation Mechanism (JIM) as well as the OPCW Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), Fact-Finding Missions (FFM) and the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT). The European Union strongly condemns the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Air Force in Ltamenah in March 2017 and in Saraqib in February 2018, as concluded by the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team reports. The European Union welcomes the issuing of the two latest reports of the FFM and takes note of their conclusions confirming the use of chemicals as weapons in Marea, on 1st September 2015, and Kafr Zeita on 1 October 2016, respectively.

The European Union commends the work of the Technical Secretariat on all aspects of the Syrian chemical weapons programme. In this context, we value the confidential TS briefings to States Parties on their on-going work and working methods. We also commend the Director-

General's continuous efforts to engage with the Syrian Arab Republic, and we encourage Syria to act constructively, as there is no alternative to cooperation. Refusal to issue visas for OPCW staff and preventing their deployment on the ground seriously hampers the work of the Technical Secretariat and its ability to fulfil its mandate. This is contrary to the obligations of States Parties under Art VII, paragraph 7, of the Convention. We therefore urge Syria to issue visas without delay for all staff members of the OPCW, including all the members of the DAT, in accordance with the Convention and UNSCR 2018.

The European Union looks forward to the continuation of the work of the IIT and the release of its next reports, and is determined to ensure full follow up of all findings. We have already imposed restrictive measures on 32 senior Syrian officials and scientists and two entities for their role in the development and use of chemical weapons. We are ready to consider introducing further measures as appropriate, and we will continue to work towards ensuring full accountability for those responsible for these egregious crimes.

The European Union and its Member States will continue to work at national and international levels in order to address chemical weapons attacks and other atrocities committed in the Syrian Arab Republic. The European Union also continues to support collective efforts to ensure accountability for perpetrators of chemical attacks through the International Partnership Against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons (PAI).

Mrs. Chairperson,

Addressing the threat from chemical weapons use is a key item on the Executive Council agenda and is essential for upholding international norms related to chemical weapons use. The European Union reiterates its strong concerns that the Russian Federation still has not reacted to international calls, including those reiterated on the occasion of the 98th session of the Executive Council and during the 26th Conference of States Parties in December 2021, for a thorough and transparent investigation into the assassination attempt on the Russian opposition politician Mr. Alexei Navalny. The poisoning of Mr. Navalny in Russia by a military chemical nerve agent of the "Novichok" group in August 2020 (a substance developed by Russia), has been confirmed, beyond doubt, by specialised laboratories in Germany, France and Sweden, as well as by the OPCW. The European Union has condemned the poisoning in the strongest possible terms.

Impunity for the use of chemical weapons must not and will not be tolerated. On 15 October 2020, the European Union introduced a sanction regime dedicated to fighting the proliferation and use of chemical weapons. Under that regime, the EU has designated five Syrian officials and one entity involved in Syria's chemical weapons program, as well as ten Russian nationals and one entity linked either to the Salisbury attack or the poisoning of Mr. Navalny with the "Novichok" nerve agent. Furthermore, fully in line with the findings of the report on the poisoning of Mr. Navalny issued on 10 January 2022 by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), the European Union member states join PACE in calling upon the Russian Federation to "fulfil its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention, including by investigating the alleged development, production, stockpiling, and use of a chemical weapon on Russian territory, and by providing substantive replies to questions posed by other States parties", including to the questions asked by 45 States Parties in the framework of Art. IX, paragraph 2 of the Convention on 5th October 2021.

The European Union once again urges the Russian Federation, with full transparency and without further delay, to disclose and to explain credibly the circumstances of the assassination attempt against Mr. Navalny.

Mrs. Chairperson,

The Chemical Weapons Convention is a key instrument of the global disarmament and non-proliferation architecture. It requires a predictable and solid financial base to reach a world free of chemical weapons. The European Union calls upon all States Parties to pay their assessed contributions in full and on time.

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 16,1 million, including voluntary contributions made by EU Member States in their national capacity. We would like to commend the Director-General for the progress achieved and 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 not only benefit all States Parties, including in capacity-building, but also the Technical Secretariat, by contributing towards its capabilities in investigation, verification and assistance.

Mrs. Chairperson,

The European Union commends the Director-General for working towards a more gender-balanced, diverse and representative Technical Secretariat. We look forward to further progress in this area, including the enhancement of gender mainstreaming and the sharing of results with States Parties. This should include progress updates on implementation of the Gender and Diversity Audit's recommendations.

The European Union welcomes efforts to amend the OPCW Tenure Policy, with a view to improving the Technical Secretariat's ability to maintain key expertise required to ensure the continued implementation of the Convention.

The German initiative on Executive Council business continuity aims at providing guidance for emergency circumstances, in which in-person meetings are not possible and it might therefore become necessary to use virtual meeting technology for Executive Council meetings or sessions. The European Union congratulates States Parties on their constructive engagement in this matter and fully supports the resulting draft decision tabled by a growing, cross-regional group of States Parties including Germany. All members of the OPCW Executive Council are strongly encouraged to join the broad consensus and to support the adoption of this decision.

Mrs. Chairperson,

We take this opportunity to thank the Director-General Arias and his staff for their efforts in ensuring the implementation of the Convention in spite of the challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. We look forward to returning to pre-pandemic meeting practices as soon as conditions allow.

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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