



**OPCW**

**Executive Council**

Ninety-Ninth Session  
8 – 10 March 2022

EC-99/NAT.41  
8 March 2022  
ENGLISH and FRENCH only

**FRANCE**

**STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE EUROPEAN UNION  
DELIVERED BY H.E. AMBASSADOR LUIS VASSY  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC TO THE OPCW  
AT THE NINETY-NINTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the European Union.

The candidate countries Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Turkey, the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, the European Free Trade Association countries and members of the European Economic Area Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway, as well as Georgia and Ukraine align themselves with this statement.

Andorra, Monaco, and San Marino also associate themselves with this statement.

Madam Chairperson,

The Ninety-Ninth Session of the Executive Council (“the Council”) opens in the context of one of the darkest hours in 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. Through its illegal military actions, Russia is flagrantly violating international law and the principles of the United Nations Charter, undermining European and global security and stability. Russia bears full responsibility for this act of aggression and for all the destruction and loss of life that it will cause. It will be held accountable for its actions. The European Union demands that Russia immediately cease its military actions, unconditionally withdraw all its forces and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine, and fully respect Ukraine’s territorial integrity, sovereignty, and independence within its internationally recognised borders. In this context, the European Union wishes to denounce the baseless statements by Russian officials regarding allegations of provocations with chemical components in Ukraine.

The European Union warmly thanks H.E. Ambassador Abdelouahab Bellouki of Morocco for his dedication and successful tenure as Chairperson of the Council under challenging circumstances. We wish him all the best with his new duties. The European Union also wishes to thank Ambassador Gudrun Lingner of Germany, Vice-Chairperson of the Council, for ensuring continuity and for efficiently guiding the preparatory work for the Ninety-Ninth Session. 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 (“the Secretariat”), including in its professionalism, impartiality, and well-established technical expertise in implementing the Chemical Weapons Convention (“the Convention”) and the work entrusted to it by the States Parties. It is my pleasure to inform the 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 underscores the complementarity of the work of the OPCW and the United Nations and the cooperation between them. We appreciate the regular sharing of information of the OPCW’s activities and investigations with the United Nations Secretary-General, as well as the Director-General’s briefings to the United Nations Security Council. We remain steadfast in defending the OPCW against attacks on its integrity and credibility through deliberate, state-sponsored disinformation campaigns.

The twenty-fifth anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention will fall on 29 April 2022. The European Union welcomes the successful and verified destruction of 99% of the chemical weapons stockpiles declared by possessor States. Despite the progress made in this regard, the re-emergence of the 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. Achieving a common vision in the fight against the re-emergence of chemical weapons and safeguarding the global norm of non-use is a responsibility shared by all States Parties.

The decision adopted by the Conference of the States Parties (“the Conference”) at its Twenty-Fifth Session suspending the voting rights and the privileges of the Syrian Arab Republic owing to its failure to comply with the Convention is a strong message from 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 Syrian Arab Republic’s clear violation of the Convention and its core principles. This decision comes more than eight years after the adoption of United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 (2013), and is a consequence of Syria’s continued failure 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 has been substantiated through comprehensive and thorough investigations carried out by the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigation Mechanism (JIM), the OPCW Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), Fact-Finding Mission (FFM), and 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 IIT reports. The European Union welcomes the issuing of the two latest reports of the FFM and notes their conclusions, which confirm the use of chemicals as a weapon in Marea on 1 September 2015 and in Kafr Zeita on 1 October 2016, respectively.

The European Union commends the work of the Secretariat on all aspects of the Syrian chemical weapons programme, in particular the confidential briefings to States Parties on their ongoing 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 participate constructively in these exchanges in order to make progress, in particular in regard to the speedy issuance of visas for OPCW staff. 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 Secretariat and its ability to fulfil its mandate. This is contrary to the obligations of States Parties under paragraph 7 of Article VII of the Convention. We demand that Syria issue visas without delay for all staff members of the OPCW, including all the members of the DAT, in accordance with the Convention and United Nations Security Council resolution 2118.

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 the findings of such reports. 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 heinous 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.

Addressing the threat from chemical weapons use is one of the main objectives of the Council 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 responded to international calls, including those repeated during the Ninety-Eighth Session of the Council and during the Twenty-Sixth Session of the Conference in December 2021, for a thorough and transparent investigation into the assassination attempt against the Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny. The August 2020 poisoning of Mr Navalny in Russia with a military nerve agent of the novichok group—a substance developed by Russia—has been confirmed, beyond any doubt, by specialised laboratories in Germany, France, and Sweden, as well as by the OPCW. The European Union has condemned this poisoning in the strongest possible terms.

Impunity for the use of chemical weapons must and will not be tolerated. On 15 October 2020, the European Union introduced a sanctions regime dedicated to fighting the proliferation and use of chemical weapons. Under the regime, the European Union has designated five Syrian officials and one entity involved in the Syrian chemical weapons programme, as well as 10 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 the questions posed by 45 States Parties on 5 October 2021 within the framework of paragraph 2 of Article IX of the Convention.

The European Union once again urges the Russian Federation, in full transparency and without further delay, to disclose and to provide credible explanations regarding the circumstances of the assassination attempt against Mr Navalny.

The Convention is a pivotal instrument in the global disarmament and non-proliferation architecture. It must be supported by a predictable and solid financial basis to achieve a world free from chemical weapons. The European Union calls upon all States Parties to pay their assessed contributions in full and on time.

The successful transformation of the OPCW Laboratory into a Centre for Chemistry and Technology (ChemTech Centre) will be key to helping the Organisation perform its core tasks in verification, inspection, and capacity building. A large number of States Parties have committed voluntary funding to the establishment of the ChemTech Centre. The European Union has made a substantial voluntary contribution of EUR 16.1 million to this project, which includes the voluntary contributions of European Union Member States in their national capacity. We wish to commend the Director-General for his efforts in keeping the ChemTech Centre project on track despite 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 Secretariat by helping to maintain its investigation, verification, and assistance capabilities.

The European Union commends the Director-General for working towards a more gender-balanced, diverse, and representative 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 recommendations from the gender and diversity audit.

The European Union welcomes the efforts to amend the OPCW tenure policy, which are aimed at improving the Secretariat's ability to maintain its key expertise to ensure continued implementation of the Convention.

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

We take this opportunity to thank 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 that this statement be considered as an official document and that it be posted on the OPCW external server and public website.