

STATEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
BY H.E. AMBASSADOR KATEŘINA SEQUENSOVÁ
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC TO THE OPCW
AT THE 100th SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL
(The Hague, 5-8 July 2022)

Agenda item 5 – General debate

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

The Candidate Countries Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, and the EFTA (European Free Trade Association) countries Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the EEA (European Economic Area), as well as Georgia align themselves with this statement.

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

Mr. Chairperson,

The European Union (EU) warmly welcomes the new Chairperson, H.E. Ambassador Ziad Al Atiyah of Saudi Arabia, at the helm of the Executive Council. Sir, we thank you for your willingness to assume this responsibility and assure you of our full support in steering the work of the Executive Council in the months to come.

We also take this opportunity to commend the leadership of OPCW Director General, Ambassador Fernando Arias, and reiterate our full confidence in the OPCW Technical Secretariat (TS), its professionalism, impartiality and well-established technical expertise in implementing the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and tasks assigned by the States Parties.

Mr. Chairperson,

The 100th Executive Council meets as Russia's unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine rages on. We condemn in the strongest possible terms Russia's armed aggression, which grossly violates international law and the UN Charter, and undermines

European and international peace and security. The EU resolutely supports Ukraine's right to self-defence and the Ukrainian armed forces' efforts to defend Ukraine's territorial integrity and population in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter. The EU demands that Russia immediately cease its military actions, withdraw all its troops from the entire territory of Ukraine and fully respect Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence within its internationally recognised borders. 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 UN General Assembly, in its resolutions of 2 March and 24 March 2022, has deplored in the strongest terms the aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine in violation of Article 2 (4) of the UN Charter. It demands that the Russian Federation immediately ceases its use of force against Ukraine and refrains from any further unlawful threat or use of force against any Member State. Furthermore, it also deplores the involvement of Belarus in this unlawful use of force and calls upon it to abide by its international obligations. These resolutions send a powerful message to Russia and Belarus that they are isolated in their actions.

Moreover, as part of its aggression against Ukraine, Russia has engaged in a campaign of disinformation in spreading unsubstantiated and unfounded allegations against Ukraine and others regarding chemical weapons while risking exposure of the Ukrainian population to toxic chemicals through their deliberate attacks against civilian industrial facilities. Let us recall that Russia, the country responsible for the ongoing conflict and violence, has a track record in the use of chemical weapons in assassinations and assassination attempts as well as in sowing disinformation which seeks to undermine the international rules-based order. It is well established that Ukraine is a responsible member of the Chemical Weapons Convention and in full compliance with the Convention. In this context, we also remain steadfast in defending the OPCW Technical Secretariat against baseless accusations and attacks on its integrity and credibility through deliberate campaigns of state-sponsored disinformation. Following the Russian aggression on Ukraine, the EU has adopted sanctions against Russia. On 3 of June 2022, the list of sanctions was amended to ban the export of chemicals to Russia that could be misused for the manufacturing of chemical weapons.

Mr. 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, and the integrity of the Convention. It is an appropriate response by the Conference to the clear violation by the Syrian Arab Republic of the Convention and its core principles. This message has become even more important as the international community is exposed to aggressive and irresponsible behaviour of one of the States Parties that could result in further violations of the Convention. 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 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. We 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 obligations of States parties under Article VII paragraph 7 of the Convention and UNSCR 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 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.

Mr. Chairperson,

Addressing the threat of chemical weapons use is a pillar of the Convention and essential for upholding international legal norms. The European Union reiterates its strong concerns that the Russian Federation has not reacted to international calls, including those reiterated on the occasion of the 99th 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 this poisoning in the strongest possible terms.

The European Union once again urges the Russian Federation to provide answers to the questions posed by 45 States Parties in the framework of Art. IX, paragraph 2 of the Convention on 5th October 2021, and to disclose without further delay the circumstances of the assassination attempt against Mr. Navalny.

Mr. Chairperson,

The 29th of April 2022 marked 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 the progress made in this regard, the re-emergence of the use of chemical weapons is a significant threat 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. 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. The European Union and its Member States will contribute actively and constructively to the work of the Open Ended Working Group (OEWG).

In this context, I would like to express our gratitude to the Chairperson, Ambassador Lauri Kuusing of Estonia, for leading the work in an open and inclusive manner, with the goal of

building consensus. We trust that his suggested thematic work programme will allow all delegations to effectively express their expectations and priorities regarding the variety of topics at stake for the future of our Organisation. The European Union also extends its warm thanks to the members of the Bureau for their joint commitment to this preparatory process.

In view of the Fifth Review Conference, a substantive, thorough and inclusive process will be essential in order to provide guidance to the Technical Secretariat. The European Union is convinced of the importance of engaging all relevant stakeholders in the preparatory process, ranging from chemical industry to think tanks, civil society organisations and non-governmental organisations.

Mr. Chairperson,

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. 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 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.

Mr. 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 towards gender equality in the Organisation, including through the enhancement of gender mainstreaming in all areas of the Technical Secretariat's work. We underline the importance of the swift implementation of the recommendations of and the Gender and Diversity Audit, and encourage the timely sharing of results with States Parties on this implementation.

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 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 fully supports the further refined draft decision (Rev2) tabled by a cross-regional group of States Parties including Germany. All members of the OPCW Executive Council are strongly encouraged to join consensus and to support the adoption of this decision.

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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