



STATEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
BY H.E. AMBASSADOR OLIVIER BELLE
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF BELGIUM TO THE OPCW
AT THE 105th SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL
(The Hague, 5 - 8 March 2024)

Agenda item 7 (e) - Addressing the threat from chemical weapons use

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

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

It is well established that Ukraine is a responsible member of the Chemical Weapons Convention and in full compliance with the Convention. However, as part of its war of aggression and to cover its own actions, Russia is engaging in campaigns of state-controlled disinformation by spreading unsubstantiated and unfounded allegations against Ukraine and others regarding chemical weapons. At the same time Russia risks the exposure of Ukrainian population to toxic chemicals through continuous deliberate attacks against civilian industrial facilities. Let us recall that Russia - member of the UN Security Council - responsible for the ongoing war and for violations of international law and international humanitarian law in Ukraine, has a track record of using chemical weapons in assassinations and assassination attempts as well as in sowing disinformation.

Furthermore, we remain strongly concerned about the growing number of reports, amongst others by Russian information sources, on the use of riot control agents by Russia as a method of warfare. Such use is prohibited under Article I of the Convention. Until today, Russia has not provided a plausible explanation when asked about RCA incidents pursuant to Article IX, paragraph 2 of the Convention. Instead, Russia tries to put blame on the other side. This is not acceptable. In this context, I would like to recall that on 3 June 2022, the EU introduced a ban on the export of chemicals to Russia that could be misused for manufacturing of chemical weapons.

Mr. Chairperson,

The European Union reiterates its strong concerns that the Russian Federation has not reacted to international calls for a thorough and transparent investigation into the assassination attempt on Mr. Alexei Navalny in Russia in August 2020 by a nerve agent of the “Novichok” group (a substance developed by Russia). The poisoning has been confirmed, beyond doubt, by specialised laboratories in Germany, France and Sweden, as well as by the OPCW. We once again urge the Russian Federation to provide substantial answers to the questions posed by 45 States Parties in the framework of Art. IX, paragraph 2 of the Convention on 5 October 2021, and to disclose without further delay the circumstances of this assassination attempt. The death of Mr. Navalny does not relieve the Russian Federation of its obligation to provide answers to the questions posed.

Impunity for the use of chemical weapons must not and will not be tolerated. Those responsible for the assassination attempts must be brought to justice. Since 15 October 2020, the European Union has imposed restrictive measures under its chemical weapons sanctions regime against fourteen Russian individuals, including agents, high-ranking officials of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) and Russian chemical weapons experts, as well as one entity responsible for inducing and providing support to the poisoning of Mr. Alexei Navalny. Previously, the EU has introduced sanctions on four senior officials from the Russian military intelligence service involved in the poisonings with “Novichok” in Salisbury in 2018.

Mr. Chairperson,

In light of the threat for re-emergence of chemical weapons use, it is of utmost importance that the Technical Secretariat remains alert and able to fulfil its tasks. We appreciate that it continues to monitor the situation in Ukraine closely. We furthermore appreciate the Technical Secretariat’s work in providing equipment and training to Ukraine in order to assist them with their readiness and preparedness to respond to a potential chemical weapons attack.

I would kindly ask you to consider this statement as an official document of the One-Hundred and Fifth Session of the Executive Council and post it on the OPCW external server and public website.

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