

[Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on the escalating tensions in the Azov Sea](#)

The EU expresses its utmost concern about the dangerous increase of tensions in the Azov Sea and Kerch Strait in recent days which has led to the seizure of Ukrainian vessels and their crews by Russia and shots being fired at them, wounding several Ukrainian servicemen. We are dismayed at this use of force by Russia which, against the backdrop of increasing militarisation in the area, is unacceptable.

The European Union expects Russia to ensure unhindered and free passage through the Kerch strait to and from the Azov Sea, in accordance with international law. We call on all for utmost restraint to de-escalate the situation immediately. In this context, we also call strongly on Russia to release the captured vessels, their crew and equipment unconditionally and without delay.

The illegal annexation of the Crimean peninsula by Russia in 2014 remains a direct challenge to international security, with grave implications for the international legal order that protects the unity and sovereignty of all States. We reconfirm our condemnation of this violation of international law. The construction of the Kerch bridge constitutes a further violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The European Union reiterates its full support for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders. The European Union does not and will not recognise the illegal annexation of the Crimean peninsula by Russia. The European Union will continue to follow closely the situation and is determined to act appropriately, in close coordination with its international partners.

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