



European Union

**EU Statement at
General Debate**

**31st session of the Commission on
Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)**

Vienna, 16-20 May 2022

Distinguished Chair,

Dear colleagues,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its Member States. The following countries align themselves with this statement: the Republic of North Macedonia*, Montenegro*, Albania*, Bosnia and Herzegovina*, Iceland+, Norway+, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Andorra and San Marino.

The Commission of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice whose mandate includes leading the international action to combat national and transnational crime, is gathering in a critical context. Indeed, as we speak, the Russian Federation's unlawful, unprovoked and unjustified aggression in Ukraine is causing massive loss of life and harm to civilians. Therefore, let me express the EU and its Member States' full solidarity with Ukraine and the Ukrainian people. Today, the EU is more determined than ever to stand for the principles we value and strongly condemn the war crimes committed by the Russian Federation in Ukraine, which are threatening international security, stability and violate international law and our common principles as United Nations. The Union confirms its commitment to providing all the necessary assistance to Ukrainian authorities to investigate and prosecute war crimes, including by providing forensic expertise and technical assistance, to ensure the perpetrators are brought to justice. The EU also remains firm in enforcing its restrictive measures towards designated Russian and Belarussian individuals and companies.

In this context, the European Union and its Member States are extremely concerned over the spill-over effect of the war on organised crime in Ukraine and

* Candidate Countries the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania as well as potential Candidate Country Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

+ Iceland and Norway are members of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.

beyond. As a result of the Russian Federation's aggression, recent analyses, including a just released report from UNODC, already show heightened crime patterns in several crime areas, including trafficking in human beings. As such, the European Union is deeply concerned about the safety of refugees entering the EU from Ukraine, especially women and girls, who are particularly at risk of being targeted by traffickers. In this context, the EU has strengthened cooperation among its Member States and with the EU Agencies, including Europol and Frontex, to address and counter serious and organised crime threats linked to the war in Ukraine. The aim is to enhance information exchanges and to reinforce operational actions to ensure rapid and coordinated operational responses if necessary, including against human traffickers. Since the beginning of the war, the EU has been on alert on the risks of trafficking and active in reducing the vulnerability of persons fleeing. Just last week (11 May 2022), the Solidarity Platform endorsed a Common Anti-trafficking plan developed under the leadership of the EU Anti-trafficking Coordinator, which will be pursued with concrete actions at the EU level and through recommendations to EU Member States. Its key priorities are: 1) strengthening awareness on the risks of trafficking; 2) reinforcing prevention; 3) enhancing law enforcement and judicial responses; 4) improving early identification, support and protection of victims; 5) cooperating to address the risks of trafficking in non-EU countries, especially Ukraine and Moldova.

The EU recalls the importance of addressing the broader spectrum of gender-based violence, especially in a context where violence against women and girls increased and access to justice was made difficult due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Cybercrimes including those related to online sexual exploitation of children have also increased in the past years. To respond to these challenges, last week, after four years of negotiations, the Council of Europe opened for signature the Second Additional Protocol to the Council of Europe Budapest Convention on Cybercrime. In this deteriorating context, the EU emphasises upon the gravity of the situation in Ukraine, considering that unaccompanied refugee minors may constitute additional possible targets for criminal groups. The EU regards the upcoming thematic discussions on cybercrime as particularly relevant and hope that they will bring out solutions to prevent and combat child sexual abuse and exploitation. .

Addressing this issue also has broader implications for the resilience of the youth against organised crime, considering that long-term consequences for victims include the intergenerational transmission of violence, which makes them possible targets for criminal enrolment as they grow older. In order to prevent young people from becoming the leaders of tomorrow's criminal organisations,

the EU considers crime prevention activities as essential for the safety and resilience of society.

Mr Chair,

Crime does not stop at a border; neither should justice. In our interconnected world, to fight cross-border crime more effectively, we must make the best use of digital technologies to provide judicial authorities, citizens and businesses with swift and secure means of exchange of information. The EU strongly believes that the digitalisation of justice could be an asset in the fight against crime, especially in the context of cross-border proceedings and in speeding up the process of law-enforcement operations. Accordingly, the European Commission recently proposed several initiatives to digitalise EU justice systems aiming to make digital communication channels the default channel in cross-border judicial cases. Following several legislative upgrades our judicial cooperation agency, Eurojust, will spearhead this digital revolution in the area of cross-border prosecutions, enabling it to improve information exchange in terrorism cases and to ensure that war crime evidence is securely stored.

Mr Chair,

Combating crime requires a holistic approach considering that organised crime groups' opportunity-maximising goals lead them to engage in several forms of criminal activities at a time. As a result, profits made out of, for instance, fraud schemes and environmental criminal activities help funding other organised crime activities such as trafficking in drugs and in human beings. The EU and its Member States will continue to promote the fight against environmental crime at international level, including as regards the recourse to international law to protect the environment. In this regards, the EU is currently revising its environmental crime legislation, and the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union will organise a symposium on 17 and 18 of May in Marseille on the protection of the environment through criminal law.

While this criminal economic model prospers, it undermines the public and private economy. Indeed, environmental crimes, fraud schemes and criminal finances create unfair competition thereby undermining economic growth. Yet, economic recovery is crucial in the post-COVID 19 societies, and it will be fundamental in post-conflict Ukraine. Vigilance over financial crimes is particularly important as the COVID-19 pandemic economic recovery funds are being distributed across the world to rebuild and strengthen economies and societal resilience. To address an expected fraud wave triggered by criminal groups seeking to gain access to NextGenerationEU funds, the EU has launched

Operation Sentinel, which has been joined by four EU entities as well as national authorities from nineteen EU Member States.

Mr Chair,

The EU would like to end this statement by drawing attention to yet another growing crime area. In the last decades, there has been a strong rise in hate speech and hate crime in the EU. This phenomenon was further heightened due to the pandemic which contributed to exacerbating feelings of insecurity, isolation and fear. Considering the cross-border nature of this crime and its impact on targeted individuals and communities, the European Commission has recently proposed to extend the list of EU crimes to hate speech. While hate speech and hate crime severely impact the EU's common values, defending those values also means defending human rights and freedom. Therefore, the EU is committed to finding the right balance between protecting the right to freedom of expression and defending the dignity of each individual.

Thank you Mr Chair.