

2016 Annual Security Review Conference

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Special Session - Ensuring security and stability in the OSCE region in light of developments with respect to Ukraine

**Address to the ASRC by Mr Luc Devigne
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Service
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The European Union and its Member States welcome this special session and thank the speakers for their presentations. More than two years have passed since the Russian Federation illegally annexed Crimea and Sevastopol and began destabilising eastern Ukraine. This ongoing conflict is a most serious challenge to European Security and the consequences have been dire: More than 30.000 casualties, millions forced from their homes, and a severe deterioration of the human right's situation in Donbass, particularly in areas held by Russian backed separatists, and on the illegally annexed Crimean peninsula. As stated in the opening session, Russia's actions have violated international law and basic OSCE principles and commitments. To overcome these challenges, respect for OSCE principles must be restored and the Russian Federation must reverse acts that contravene these principles. There is a need for a genuine dialogue to this end.

We remain deeply concerned by the deteriorating security situation in eastern Ukraine. The concentration of heavy weapons and the close proximity of military formations across the line of contact, increase the risk of further escalation. Indeed, the level of ceasefire violations reported by the SMM is now on par with pre-April levels. We urge all sides to take immediate steps to disengage, strictly adhere to the ceasefire, unconditionally and verifiably withdraw all Minsk-regulated weapons and ensure the SMM full, safe and unhindered access throughout Ukraine, including along the Ukrainian-Russian State border and to the illegally annexed Crimea. The sides have at least on two occasions, last September and recently during the Orthodox Easter, demonstrated that they can implement a full ceasefire if they so choose. As underlined by Chairperson-in-Office Frank-Walter Steinmeier and echoed by ODIHR, security is indispensable for the holding of local elections in certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk in accordance with Ukrainian law, relevant OSCE standards and monitored by ODIHR. We recall our firm position that established conditions for ODIHR monitoring, including ensuring security and access, must be met. We welcome the informal consultations launched by the CiO on how the OSCE can contribute to the security of local elections in certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

The OSCE continues to play an indispensable role in facilitating the full implementation of the Minsk agreements. Among numerous efforts, let us highlight just two: On the ground, the SMM is continuously adapting to difficult circumstances to reduce tensions and to diligently, objectively and impartially monitor and verify the sides' adherence to relevant Minsk provisions. We deplore that the SMM, now in its third year, continues to face significant restrictions in its freedom of movement and its access, particularly in separatist-held areas despite numerous assurances to the contrary. Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Martin Sajdik, continues his vital work in the Trilateral Contact Group along with the Coordinators of the four working groups. However, although their remarkable efforts have yielded some results, many significant challenges remain.

We remain firm in our conviction that a sustainable political solution must be based on the full implementation of the Minsk agreements by all sides, in line with OSCE's principles and commitments and Ukraine's independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity. The ceasefire must be respected, heavy weapons withdrawn and foreign armed formations, military equipment as well as mercenaries removed from the territory of Ukraine. Re-establishing full Ukrainian control of its state border is essential. We underline Russia's responsibility in this regard and yet again call on Russia to use its considerable influence over the separatists it backs to meet those Minsk commitments in full.

The EU recalls its unwavering support to the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence of Ukraine, and calls upon Russia to do likewise. We urge Russia to recognise these fundamental principles that it has itself invoked many times and to contribute, by acts and public pronouncements, to stabilise the situation and reverse moves that contravene these principles. We reiterate our strong condemnation of the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol to the Russian Federation and we will not recognise it.