



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council N° 1176
Vienna, 15 February 2018**

**EU Statement on “Russia’s Ongoing Aggression against
Ukraine and Illegal Occupation of Crimea”**

Mr. Chairperson, the mandate of the SMM calls for full, safe and unhindered access throughout Ukraine including along the Ukrainian-Russian border and the Crimean peninsula. Without proper and unimpeded monitoring by the SMM, there cannot be a verified improvement of the security situation, which is the basis for further progress on the political track. We are concerned about the increased level of threats faced by the SMM as shown by the high number of incidents last week involving its monitors and assets, primarily in areas held by Russian-backed separatists. For example on 9 February so-called “DPR” members fired warning shots in the vicinity of an SMM patrol. In addition, the SMM observed small-arms fire targeting their UAVs on several occasions last week on both sides of the contact line. These are some instances among many of the SMM being restricted in their freedom of movement, and being subject to hostile and threatening behavior targeting their patrols or equipment. We strongly condemn such actions and threats directed at our monitors as well as any kind of hampering with the technical equipment of our monitors. We recall that the mandate of the SMM calls for full, safe and unhindered access for not only its observers but also for its technical equipment.

The SMM also reported that during the past month, the SMM’s passage was conditioned seven times at the same checkpoint in non-government-controlled Kreminecs, which caused serious restrictions to the Mission’s monitoring activity, in contravention of the SMM’s mandate.

During the last reporting period 26 January – 4 February, the number of ceasefire violations recorded by the SMM increased by 30 per cent compared with the previous reporting period. Notably, the number of ceasefire violations in the Avdiivka-Yasynuvata-Donetsk airport area increased to levels similar to the weeks before the

23 December recommitment to ceasefire. Together with an increase in the use of Minsk-proscribed weapons this bears witness to a deteriorating situation on the ground. We deplore any violations of the ceasefire and call on all sides to cease hostilities, disengage and ensure comprehensive action on mine clearance in accordance with the Minsk agreements. Lack of progress by all sides on mine clearance is of particular concern. The SMM has reported newly laid mines in the Petrivske area and the continued presence of mines near entry exit checkpoints, and confirmed 11 civilian casualties related to mines and unexploded ordnance between 25 November and 31 January.

We reiterate our call on the Russian Federation to return to the JCCC. We also call on Russia and Ukraine to re-establish the functionality of the JCCC and to strengthen cooperation within its framework. We deeply regret that due to this unilateral withdrawal by the Russian Federation, a number of important repair projects, as reported by Chief Monitor Ambassador Apakan at last week's Permanent Council, have been stalled due to a lack of security guarantees in areas outside government control.

Ambassador Apakan and Ambassador Sajdik also reported at last week's Permanent Council that the temporary repair work that was done in the end of 2017 to the bridge at Stanytsia Luhanska has been damaged by the severe weather conditions. This has severe implications for the thousands of civilians that depend on this crossing point on a daily basis. We call on all sides to ensure that necessary conditions are in place to facilitate urgent and essential repair of civilian infrastructure, to open additional crossings points, notably at Zolote and Shchastya, without preconditions, and proceed with disengagement at Stanytsia Luhanska in accordance with the decision taken by the sides in the TCG in September 2016.

We remain firm in our call on all sides to swiftly and fully implement the Minsk agreements and honour their commitments in full in order to achieve a sustainable political solution in line with OSCE principles and commitments. Restoring respect for these principles is crucial. We call on Russia to fully assume its responsibility and to use its considerable influence over the separatists it backs to meet the Minsk commitments in full. We again call on Russia to immediately stop providing financial and military support to the separatists, and we remain deeply concerned about information on the presence of Russian military equipment and personnel in

separatist-held areas. The duration of the European Union's economic sanctions against Russia is linked to the complete implementation of the Minsk agreements.

The EU recalls its unwavering support to the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders, 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 the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol to the Russian Federation and we will not recognise it. The European Union will remain committed to fully implement its non-recognition policy, including through restrictive measures.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.