



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council No 1133
Vienna, 9 February 2017**

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

More than a week ago, the Trilateral Contact Group co-ordinated a statement calling for a renewed commitment to the ceasefire, the withdrawal of heavy weapons by 5 February, full SMM access and the facilitation of humanitarian efforts. On all accounts, much remains to be done. As reported by the SMM, intense fighting continues in hot spots and heavy weapons remain concentrated close to the contact line. Moreover, humanitarian actors and SMM monitors continue to face significant restrictions, and it is inadmissible that on several occasions civilian repair teams have come under attack. The humanitarian consequences of the recent escalation are already severe, as reported by the SMM and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. We therefore once again call on the sides to abide by their commitments and immediately ensure full respect of the ceasefire, full and verifiable withdrawal of Minsk-proscribed weapons, complete disengagement and full, safe and unhindered access for the SMM, and to ensure full humanitarian access in accordance with international humanitarian principles.

Fighting in eastern Ukraine has persisted for almost three years, claiming the lives of at least 10,000 people. Let us be very clear: This tragedy could not have occurred without the Russian Federation’s continued and extensive financial and military support for the separatists. We also remain deeply concerned about information on the presence of Russian military equipment and personnel in separatist-held areas. Russian denials of responsibility distort the facts and hinder efforts to resolve the conflict. We therefore urge all sides, including the Russian Federation, to live up to their commitment and contribute – in deeds, not just

words – to a peaceful resolution of the conflict in line with OSCE principles and commitments.

Despite very difficult conditions on the ground, the SMM has once again demonstrated its vital role. We commend the SMM for reacting quickly to the security deterioration in the Avdiivka area, for providing crucial and impartial reporting and for facilitating local ceasefires to allow for the repair of critical infrastructure, water supply, heating and electricity in Avdiivka.

It is therefore all the more regrettable that the SMM remains subject to severe restrictions and recurring intimidation. Another disgraceful incident occurred on 3 February, when, as reported by the SMM, an SMM patrol in a Russia-backed separatist-held part of the Luhansk region was threatened by three armed men in military-style uniforms. This is unacceptable and we expect the JCCC to swiftly and comprehensively follow-up. Such incidents must not take place with impunity. We again call on the sides to ensure full, safe and unhindered SMM access throughout Ukraine without further delay. We also underline that the SMM must be provided with the necessary baseline information by the sides in order to verify the withdrawal of Minsk-proscribed weapons. The baseline information hitherto provided by the sides is insufficient. We also again underline the importance of a timely extension of the SMM mandate and that the mission is adequately resourced.

We again call on the sides in the Trilateral Contact Group and its working groups to agree on steps toward the full implementation of the Minsk agreements. This includes the modalities of local elections in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in full accordance with Ukrainian legislation, OSCE standards and monitored by ODIHR. We reiterate our firm position that established conditions for ODIHR monitoring, including ensuring security and access, must first be met. We call on the sides to agree on additional disengagement areas, the release of all hostages and illegally detained persons, and to swiftly resume work in the economic working group.

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. 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 commitments in full. We recall that 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 Crimea and Sevastopol to the Russian Federation and we will not recognise it.

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 and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA and align themselves with this statement.

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