



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council No 1148
Vienna, 1 June 2017**

**EU statement on “Russia’s Ongoing Aggression Against
Ukraine and Illegal Annexation of Crimea”**

The European Union remains deeply concerned about the volatile and unpredictable security situation in eastern Ukraine. Against the backdrop of continued patrolling restrictions following the deadly incident of April 23 in an area held by Russia-backed separatists, the SMM recorded fewer ceasefire violations in some areas in the latest reporting period, but there is still significant cause for concern. The SMM continues to document civilian casualties, large concentrations of heavy weapons in violation of the withdrawal lines, and the continued proximity of heavily armed forces and formations. The continued proximity of heavily armed forces and formations increases the risk of escalation. This is particularly regretful considering that, as noted by Ambassador Sajdik last week, it would be possible to significantly reduce the number of civilian casualties if there was the political will to do so, as the use of heavy weapons primarily takes place in the five hotspots while 85% of all ceasefire violations have occurred in just three zones.

We therefore again call on all sides to take immediate steps to ensure full respect of the ceasefire, the withdrawal of all Minsk-proscribed weapons, complete disengagement and to ensure comprehensive mine action. We expect all sides to live up to their responsibility to mark, fence and clear areas contaminated by mines and unexploded ordnance, and we once again underline the need for the JCCC to fulfil its coordination role. These are important steps towards a sustainable political solution in line with OSCE principles and commitments. Respect for these fundamental principles must be restored.

The EU expresses its continued concern regarding the humanitarian impact of the on-going crisis in parts of eastern Ukraine, and we echo Ambassador Sajdik’s call on the sides to respect human life and to protect the civilian population. We deeply

regret that so-called “humanitarian convoys” from Russia continue to enter Ukrainian territory, the sixty-third of its kind passing through on 25 May. This occurs without the consent of the Ukrainian authorities and in clear violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, and without fundamental international humanitarian principles being observed. The Minsk package foresees that humanitarian aid will be delivered through an international mechanism. An agreement on this in the humanitarian working group remains crucial.

The EU once again condemns the restrictions and aggressive intimidation of the SMM that continue to occur, primarily in areas held by separatists, in clear contradiction of existing commitments. On 15 May, near separatist-held Verkhnohyrokiivske, an armed man fired a shot into the air in the vicinity of an SMM patrol. We have recently raised other incidents in the Permanent Council as well. These repeated threats to the SMM monitors’ security, and the impunity with which they mostly occur, are simply unacceptable. We urge Russia to exercise its influence over the separatists it backs to put an end to this aggressive intimidation.

The SMM also continues to experience access restrictions and is facing increasing problems obtaining information: at one hospital in a separatist-held area, hospital staff has refused to share information about civilian casualties, referring to the need to obtain prior permission from separatists. We once again repeat that the SMM must have full, safe and unhindered access throughout Ukraine, including to the Ukraine-Russia state border. We call on the sides to ensure a safe and conducive environment for the SMM to fulfil its mandate. It is in Russia’s power to end restrictions imposed by the separatists it backs. We expect the JCCC to step up and respond rapidly and effectively when called upon by the SMM to address impediments facing the Mission. Without proper and unimpeded monitoring by the SMM, no objective reporting will be possible, which constitutes the basis for a credible and verified improvement of the security situation, which is paramount for further progress on the political track.

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 a full exchange of the detained persons on both sides of the line of contact, ending the humanitarian crisis in the conflict zone as well as 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 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 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 Crimea and 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.