



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation N°863 Vienna, 27 September 2017

EU Statement on the Security situation in and around Ukraine

1. The European Union and its Member States express once more their deep concern regarding the volatile security situation in eastern Ukraine, especially the recent increase in explosions attributable to weapons that should have been withdrawn. While welcoming the general decrease in ceasefire violations, we note that levels of violence continue to fluctuate. We urge all sides to take immediate steps to ensure full respect for the ceasefire, the withdrawal of all Minsk-proscribed weapons and continuation of the disengagement process. The SMM continues to observe a great many pieces of equipment that should either be in storage sites or have been removed beyond respective withdrawal lines, the vast majority of which is in areas outside of government control, in contravention of agreed commitments.
2. Madame Chairperson, the SMM's recently published Thematic Report on Civilian Casualties in 2016 makes for harrowing reading and we note that the number of civilian casualties in 2017 is of a similar magnitude. Hence we echo the comments on 20 September 2017 of the Special Representative of the Chairmanship in Office, in stating that civilian casualties are unacceptable. We therefore call upon all sides to comply with the recommendations in the thematic report, especially to practise the utmost restraint and take all necessary precautions to spare civilian lives, in particular by stopping attacks which do not distinguish between civilians and combatants, or between civilian objects and military objects, as required by international humanitarian law.
3. We condemn the continued interference with SMM patrols, a recent example of which occurred in Zolote, where small-arms fire in the very close vicinity of a team

engaged in launching a UAV led to the flight having to be aborted. Access was also twice denied by armed persons in Novoazovsk, despite assurances by the JCCC that the SMM would be permitted entry to the city. SMM freedom of movement is critical to the execution of its mandate and we call upon all sides to assure it. Without proper and unrestricted monitoring by the SMM, there cannot be a verified improvement of the security situation.

4. We repeat our condemnation of the continuing intimidation and threats faced by the SMM monitors, all recent examples of which have occurred in areas not controlled by the government. Such actions show a blatant disregard for the safety of SMM personnel and their ability to fulfil their mandate. The continued inadequate response to such incidents creates an environment of impunity that only encourages further threats and intimidation of SMM monitors. It is high time that those responsible are held accountable and brought to justice.
5. In the context of security of monitors, assurances by the Russian Delegation and in the TCG that steps are being taken to ensure the safety of monitors in separatist-held areas, are contradicted by the difficult reality that monitors continue to face on the ground, including the withdrawal of armed guards at the SMM office in Horlivka, as we have recently seen again on 23 September; a permanent solution to this issue needs to be found.
6. We expect the JCCC to rapidly and effectively respond immediately when called upon by the SMM, to address any impediments faced by the Mission; we reiterate once again that the SMM and its technical equipment must have full, safe and unhindered access throughout Ukraine. We urge Russia to exercise its influence over the separatists it backs, to ensure the SMM's safe access and to prevent such impediments
7. We note that the SMM has facilitated and monitored some limited demining and UXO clearance activity on both sides of the contact line, with the assistance of the JCCC. However, this positive news is counterbalanced by, for example, the behaviour observed on the M03 road between Svitlodarsk and Debaltseve, where mines were replaced shortly after having been cleared. Mines and unexploded

ordnance are a significant impediment to the monitoring ability of the SMM and, as the Thematic Report on civilian casualties emphasises, continue to pose a grave and indiscriminate threat to civilians. Therefore we expect all sides to implement their commitments to mark, fence and clear areas contaminated by mines and unexploded ordnance.

8. We call on all sides to swiftly and fully implement the Minsk agreements and honour their commitments in full. We underline Russia's responsibility in this regard and once again call on Russia to use its considerable influence over the separatists it backs, to meet these commitments in full. We reiterate our deep concern regarding information about the presence of military equipment and personnel from Russia in the conflict zone. We call on Russia to immediately stop providing financial and military support to the separatists. The ceasefire must be respected. All Minsk-regulated weapons must be withdrawn. All foreign armed formations, military equipment and mercenaries must be removed from Ukraine. Re-establishing full Ukrainian control over its state border is essential.
9. We recall our unwavering support to the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence of Ukraine, and call upon Russia to do likewise. We urge Russia to strictly observe 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 by 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 UKRAINE, GEORGIA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

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