



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council No 1146
Vienna, 18 May 2017**

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

The European Union condemns the continued restrictions and intimidation of the SMM, which pose unacceptable risks to the security of the SMM’s monitors and severely limit the ability of the Mission to fulfil its mandate. The volatile security situation, the blatant restrictions, the aggressive intimidation and systematic disinformation in areas held by Russia-backed separatists continue to occur, almost on a daily basis. We are appalled by evidence that separatists are instructed to stop SMM patrols and to deny the SMM passage unless they are on “planned routes”. We condemn this move which contradicts provisions in PC.DEC/1117 and the Addendum of 29 September 2015, recalling that the SMM must have full, safe and unhindered access throughout Ukraine, including to the Ukraine-Russia state border. We again urge Russia to exercise its influence over the separatists it backs to put an end to these unacceptable restrictions and intimidation and to ensure accountability.

In the last week, we have seen several other deeply disturbing incidents targeting the SMM. On both 11 and 15 May, in separatist-held Petrivske, armed Russia-backed separatists demanded the names and gender of the SMM patrol members, moves that are all the more alarming in light of the recent case of sexual harassment – also in Petrivske – against a female patrol member. The ongoing disinformation campaigns in separatist-held areas also pose a serious challenge as they serve to encourage hostility towards the SMM. In one instance, Russia-backed separatists demanded that the SMM pay for destroyed houses as the Mission had failed to protect the civilian population. This claim creates the false impression that the SMM is either violating or acting beyond its mandate. These consistent attempts to undermine the SMM, and the impunity with which they are carried out, are unacceptable. It is absolutely imperative that accountability is ensured in all cases of

threats, intimidation and restrictions. 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 of the peace process. We reiterate our full support to the SMM, its mandate and especially to its brave and dedicated monitors.

We recall that the SMM has had to impose patrolling restrictions following the fatal incident of 23 April, which led to less monitoring of the ceasefire by direct observation, less verification of any withdrawal of weapons, less use of remote observation technologies, and less communication with civilians. This clearly impairs SMM's ability to see the full picture. Yet the SMM continues to document violations of the Minsk agreements and ceasefire violations persist – with severe humanitarian cost: on 13 May, four civilians were killed as a result of shelling in Avdiivka. Significant concentrations of heavy weapons remain in violation of withdrawal lines, including at the aerodrome on the outskirts of Luhansk city. Over the last week, the SMM registered an increase of more than 20 per cent in the use of Minsk-proscribed weapons compared with the previous week. Moreover, the lack of demining thus far combined with the laying of new mines and unexploded ordnance poses a severe threat to the security of civilians, including the unarmed civilian monitors of the SMM. We strongly condemn the expressed intent of the separatists to lay new mine fields, as reported by the SMM. As the Chief Monitor said in this Council last week, what is needed is not more promises, but for those who have already made promises to make good on them, without excuses and without delay.

We again call on all sides to take immediate steps to ensure full respect for the ceasefire, the withdrawal of all Minsk-proscribed weapons, complete disengagement and to ensure comprehensive mine action. Marking, fencing and clearing areas contaminated by mines and unexploded ordnance remains the responsibility of the sides, and we urge them to provide the SMM with detailed and accurate maps of all areas suspected or confirmed to be contaminated, as called for by Chief Monitor Apakan in a letter of 5 May. We repeat the need for the JCCC to fulfil its coordinating role.

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 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 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.