



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council N° 1196
Vienna, 4 October 2018**

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

Mr. Chairperson, we are deeply concerned that the SMM continues to observe military presence and further expansion of positions inside designated disengagement areas. This happens despite repeated calls on the sides from the EU and others to disengage and withdraw heavy weapons and in violation of commitments made in the Trilateral Contact Group. At last week’s Permanent Council, the statement of Ambassador Sajdik also noted with deep regret, that disengagement has come to a complete halt while negotiations on the topic have reached a stalemate in the Trilateral Contact Group. We strongly urge all sides to resume these negotiations in good faith.

Adding to our concern, is the high number of heavy weapons in violation of agreed withdrawal lines. In his recent report, ambassador Apakan underlined, that with regard to heavy weapons holding areas and other storage sites any realistic assessment of the status of weapons withdrawal is obviated by weapons being removed, new weapons appearing, sites being empty and new sites springing up. The EU recalls that the withdrawal of heavy weapons, disengagement and comprehensive demining are essential prerequisites for a sustainable ceasefire and the failure of the sides to do so undermines the implementation of the Minsk agreements and poses a severe risk to civilians.

On 30 September in Horlivka, an area controlled by Russia-backed armed formations, three children were tragically killed by an explosion. Further, in many schools the SMM observes damage to the buildings caused by shelling while the fear of shelling and nearby explosions have severe negative impact on the well-being of the children. The SMM also continues to observe hardship faced by civilians crossing the contact line due to the challenging conditions

around the entry-exit checkpoints. At a checkpoint in government controlled Berezove, the SMM saw a body of a man who had collapsed suddenly and died while waiting to cross the checkpoint. In this context we echo calls for rapid and full humanitarian demining of populated areas and entry-exit checkpoints.

We continue to condemn all violations of the SMM mandate. SMM staff and their technical equipment must have safe, secure and unimpeded access throughout Ukraine. This includes the Crimean peninsula and along the entire Ukrainian-Russian border. Regrettably we see that the monitors are systematically restricted in their freedom of movement, particularly in areas held by Russia-backed armed formations. At the same time, their UAVs are targeted and jammed regularly. We repeat that the operational, security and financial consequences of these obstructions must be assessed. The parties responsible for any damage, destruction or loss of SMM UAVs and other assets should be held accountable, including politically and financially.

On 27 September, the 79th so-called “humanitarian convoy” was observed entering Ukrainian territory from Russia at the Donetsk Border Crossing Point. As with previous cases, this happened without the consent of the Ukrainian authorities, in clear violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, and without fundamental international humanitarian principles being observed. The Minsk agreements foresee that humanitarian aid is to be delivered through an international mechanism. An agreement on this in the humanitarian working group remains crucial.

The EU echoes Ambassador Sajdik in welcoming today’s decision by the Verkhovna Rada to prolong the effect of the law on the special status of certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions until the end of 2019. We agree that this is a clear confirmation of Ukraine’s commitment to the Minsk Agreements, a positive step in support of the peaceful settlement of the conflict in the east of the country.

The EU remains firm in its 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 to the conflict in line with OSCE principles and commitments. Respect for these principles and commitments must be

restored. We call on Russia to fully assume its responsibility in this regard and to use its considerable influence over the armed formations it backs to meet the Minsk commitments in full. We again call on Russia to immediately stop fueling the conflict by providing financial and military support to the armed formations, and we remain deeply concerned about information on the presence of Russian military equipment and personnel in areas held by Russia-backed armed formations. 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 uphold these fundamental principles that it has itself invoked many times and to contribute, by acts and public pronouncements, to stabilising the situation and reversing moves that contravene these principles. We strongly condemn the clear violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity by acts of aggression by the Russian armed forces since February 2014 and the illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol to the Russian Federation, which we will not recognise. We are also concerned by the ongoing militarization of the Azov Sea. 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*, 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.