



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council N° 1198
Vienna, 18 October 2018**

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

We are deeply concerned by the sharp increase in violence and the use of Minsk-proscribed weapons in the conflict zone. The level of violence has reached the number of almost 13,000 ceasefire violations for the past week in comparison with July this year, when the Mission recorded less than 17,000 ceasefire violations for the entire month. Incidents occur also in and around the disengagement pilot areas and close to SMM patrols, for instance on several occasions SMM patrols located near non-government-controlled Pervomaïsk saw explosions and heard small arms fire a few hundred meters of its location. We deeply regret the severe negative consequences of the conflict on the civilian population living in the vicinity of the line of contact. On 13 October a woman and a girl were killed by shelling in non-government controlled Zolote-5/Mykhailivka, a five Year old by was injured by shrapnels on 6 October at the same place. We reiterate our call on all sides to disengage, withdraw heavy weapons and step up efforts on comprehensive mine action, in order to ensure a comprehensive and lasting ceasefire as an important step toward a sustainable political solution in line with OSCE principles and commitments.

Mr. Chairperson, as documented by the last thematic SMM report, the work of the SMM continues to be hampered by restrictions on its freedom of movement. This happens in violation of the SMM mandate and despite repeated calls by the EU and others to ensure the free, safe, secure and unimpeded access for the SMM throughout Ukraine including the Crimean peninsula and along the entire Ukraine-Russia state border. After a minor decrease during the last half of 2017, the number of

restrictions went up again during the first half of 2018. No less than 87% of these restrictions took place in areas held by Russia-backed armed formations. Of utmost concern are the 12 occasions during the last year where the SMM was impeded by small-arms fire in its proximity or threats against it. All 12 incidents took place in areas temporarily outside Ukrainian government control. We also recall that impediments to the freedom of movement have direct repercussions for civilians living along the contact line, as the SMM is regularly prevented from facilitating repair of essential civilian infrastructure.

In order to keep our monitors safe and in order to overcome some of the aforementioned restrictions, the SMM also rely on remote observation. Despite letters from the Chief Monitor to the signatories of the Minsk agreements to ensure the unrestricted and secure operations of SMM UAVs, attacks on and interference with the Mission's technical equipment regrettably continue. The SMM underlines in their report, that the sides have shown reluctance to take responsibility and the necessary action to address this challenge. We repeat that the operational, security and financial consequences of obstructions of their technical equipment 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.

At the same time, Russia-backed armed formations escalated their systematic denial of access to a number of border areas. The rate of such restrictions tripled between July 2017 and June 2018 compared with the previous 12 months. Even when the Mission does not face freedom of movement restrictions, their visits to the border remain short due to lengthy travel time, poor road conditions and limited hours of daylight. In parallel, lack of security guarantees by those in effective control of the border areas hinders the opening of additional forward patrol bases. Consequently, the scope of what the SMM is able to observe at the border remains limited. Together with the limitations put on the Border Observation Mission, which we reiterated earlier today,

large parts of the border stay unmonitored.

In this context, we note that on the night of 10-11 October, an SMM long-range UAV once again observed a convoy of trucks entering Ukraine from the Russian Federation outside official border crossing facilities and without the consent of Ukrainian authorities. The UAV spotted two trucks and four sport-utility vehicles driving east along an unpaved road near non-government controlled Manych, 76km east of Donetsk to a location near the border with the Russian Federation where the SMM has previously observed convoys of covered cargo trucks entering Ukraine. During the same period, the UAV spotted a truck mounted with an anti-aircraft-gun driving together with a minivan and a car in a field along the same dirt path approximately 2km from the border. Briefly after the SMM had to recall the UAV from the area due to multiple instances of signal interference assessed as jamming which gives rise to serious concerns regarding the nature of the cargo transported.

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. The Minsk Agreements provide for local elections to be held within the framework of the Ukrainian legislation. Any other form of “elections” as announced by the separatists and scheduled for 11 November would contradict the letter and spirit of the Agreements and would thus be considered null and void. Elections must be organized in accordance with Ukrainian legislation, OSCE standards and monitored by ODIHR. 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. 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 UKRAINE, 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.