



**EUROPEAN UNION**

**OSCE Permanent Council N°1096  
Vienna, 14 April 2016**

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

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The European Union is deeply concerned by the severe deterioration along the line of contact. This weekend, the Donetsk region witnessed a level of violence unprecedented since the sides committed to a ceasefire in September last year. The intensified use of heavy weaponry and close proximity between military formations increases the risk of a military escalation. This serious destabilisation must be reversed. We call for immediate steps to de-escalate the situation and consolidate the ceasefire. Moreover, all sides must unconditionally and verifiably withdraw all Minsk-regulated weapons. These are necessary steps in order to move towards a sustainable political solution in line with OSCE principles and commitments.

We are extremely worried by the recent cases of intimidation of SMM monitors. An SMM patrol vehicle was hit by gunfire; monitors have been threatened at gun point, and a patrol had to take cover as bullets flew a few meters over their heads. We condemn in strongest terms these acts of blatant intimidation. Such actions are unacceptable and must stop immediately. They undermine the security of the monitors and run counter to commitments made under the Minsk agreements. We call on the parties to hold the perpetrators accountable. We also regret that the SMM, as reported, has yet to receive any report of follow-up, let alone an indication of rapid response by the JCCC regarding recent incidents.

We are also deeply concerned about the UN staff member in Ukraine being held captive in separatist-held parts of Donetsk and we join the United Nations in calling for his immediate and unconditional release.

Implementation of the Minsk agreements requires full, safe and unhindered SMM access throughout Ukraine, including along the Ukrainian-Russian State Border. Despite all parties' stated support for the SMM, significant restrictions on the SMM's freedom of movement persist, particularly in large swaths of areas held by Russia-backed separatists. SMM UAVs are regularly being disrupted. The SMM's access to separatist-held parts of the Ukrainian-Russian State border outside Ukrainian control remains limited, conditional and tightly controlled – falling significantly short of the full, safe and unhindered access the SMM is entitled to under the Minsk agreements. This is unacceptable. All restrictions on the SMM must be lifted without further delay.

We urge the sides in the Political Working Group to agree without delay on the modalities for local elections in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts in accordance with Ukrainian legislation, relevant OSCE standards and to be monitored by ODIHR. Established conditions for ODIHR observation must be met, including on security and access.

The European Union remains firm in its call on all parties to swiftly and fully implement the Minsk agreements and honour their commitments. We underline Russia's responsibility in this regard and also yet again call on Russia to use its considerable influence over the separatists it backs to meet those commitments in full. The European Union also calls on Russia to immediately stop providing the financial and military support to the separatists. The duration of the European Union's economic sanctions against Russia is linked to the complete implementation of the Minsk agreements. The ceasefire must be respected. All Minsk-regulated weapons must be withdrawn and foreign armed formations, military equipment and mercenaries removed from Ukraine. Re-establishing full Ukrainian control over its state border is essential. We reiterate our concern about information regarding the presence of military equipment and personnel from Russia.

The European Union condemns the decision taken yesterday to suspend the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatars and ban all its activities. It constitutes a further serious repressive step against the rights of Crimean Tatars, a minority that should be protected, not persecuted.

Mr Chair, the European Union recalls its unwavering support to the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence of Ukraine, and calls upon Russia to do likewise. We urge Russia to recognise these fundamental principles that it has itself invoked many times, to contribute, by acts and public pronouncements, to stabilise the situation and to 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 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, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

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