

**EUROPEAN UNION****OSCE Special Permanent Council No 1140****Vienna, 5 April 2017**

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**EU statement on “recent developments in eastern Ukraine”**

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We welcome Ambassador Sajdik and Ambassador Apakan back to the Council and thank them for their dedicated work and their briefings. We also thank Secretary General Zannier, Ambassador Marschik and Mr. Patrick Vial for their remarks. We supported efforts of the Chairmanship to reach consensus on a joint declaration for the special PC and we very much regret that this was not possible.

This Special Permanent Council Meeting was convened against the backdrop of several weeks of intense fighting in hot spots along the line of contact, several instances of aggressive intimidation of the SMM, conducted with impunity, in areas held by Russia-backed separatists, and certain administrative and economic measures that sow division, run counter to the spirit of the Minsk agreements and undermine Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity. On 29 March, the sides in the Trilateral Contact Group recommitted to a full ceasefire and withdrawal of heavy weapons on 1 April, to be verified by the SMM following its provision of full baseline information from the sides on 31 March. So this meeting is both a timely opportunity to take stock of the adherence to this recommitment and an occasion to consider how the worrying dynamics on the ground that rightly led the Chairmanship-in-Office to convene this meeting can be effectively addressed in order to ensure a sustainable ceasefire.

While the overall fighting has declined since 1 April, SMM reporting documents that ceasefire violations continue on a regular basis and Minsk-proscribed weapons remain deployed in breach of agreed withdrawal lines. The SMM has reported receiving some baseline information, but the information still does not constitute a sufficient basis for the SMM to verify the withdrawal. Finally, the intimidation of the SMM continues with impunity, as seen on 2 April in separatist-held Sakhanka, when an armed man shouted at the SMM and fired into the air whilst driving a vehicle. The

sides must take further steps to fully comply with their commitments. Full compliance with Minsk commitments remains the only path to a sustainable political solution in line with OSCE principles and commitments. Respect for these fundamental principles must be restored.

The negative security dynamic that has characterised the situation along the line of contact most of the year must be broken: Where there are weapons, there is a risk of escalation. Therefore, all Minsk-proscribed weapons must be withdrawn and the SMM must be afforded full baseline information and access to verify the process. The disengagement process should be completed in the existing areas and expanded to new hot spots. The cycle of damage, repair and new damage of critical infrastructure must end. Areas with critical infrastructure such as the Donetsk Filtration Station should be subject to protection.

Accountability is a key word in breaking this negative security dynamic. Enforcing accountability to ensure that commitments are in fact met rests with the sides, including the Russian Federation. But make no mistake: The European Union is also holding the sides accountable, assessing their Minsk compliance by their deeds, not by their words, and factoring this into our engagement.

Accountability is also an imperative in addressing the many obstacles the SMM continues to face. Having just entered its fourth year, the SMM continues to encounter significant restrictions and, overwhelmingly in separatist-held areas, aggressive intimidation and systematic disinformation. The SMM also recently again spotted white vehicles with fake SMM insignia driving east near Avdiivka. This is unacceptable. The SMM must have full, safe and unhindered access, including along the Ukrainian-Russian border, and afforded the necessary security guarantee to open planned Forward Patrol Bases in separatist-held areas, including Ambrosiivka and Antrasit.

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 reaffirm the importance of the Trilateral Contact Group and its working groups. We call on them to agree on further steps toward the full implementation of the Minsk agreements. This includes steps to reverse measures that sever economic ties across the line of

contact. It also includes agreeing on 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 also urge the sides to move forward on the release of hostages and illegally detained persons without delay.

Full humanitarian access, including for international humanitarian organisations, to areas held by Russia-backed separatists must also be ensured without further delay, in line with international humanitarian principles, and further civilian crossing points over the line of contact should be opened.

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 LIECHTENSTEIN, 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, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.