



**EUROPEAN UNION**

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**EU statement in Response to Briefings by the Special Representative in Ukraine of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office and in the Trilateral Contact Group, Ambassador Martin Sajdik and the Chief Monitor of the OSCE SMM, Ambassador Ertugrul Apakan**

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The European Union warmly welcomes Ambassadors Martin Sajdik and Ertugrul Apakan back to the Permanent Council and thanks them for their reports. Your visit comes against the backdrop of a continuously volatile security situation, characterised by ebbs and flows in ceasefire violations at the four main hotspots and along the contact line. Despite a slight decrease in ceasefire violations and the use of Minsk-proscribed weapons, the SMM continues to observe further civilian casualties, as well as new mines and an increasing incidence of recorded injuries due to unexploded ordnance. This reminds us of the sad fact that civilians, and in particular children, remain the ultimate victims of the situation on the ground. We, therefore, reiterate our call on all sides to take immediate steps to ensure full respect of the ceasefire, to withdraw all Minsk-proscribed weapons, to complete disengagement and to ensure comprehensive mine action. Full humanitarian access to areas held by Russia-backed separatists must also be ensured, in line with international humanitarian principles. These are important steps toward a sustainable political solution in line with OSCE principles and commitments. Statements by certain people in these areas on the so called proclamation of a new state entity run counter to efforts to deescalate the conflict and constitute yet another violation of these principles. Respect for these fundamental principles must be restored.

The SMM remains a central asset of the OSCE in this crisis. We want to thank Ambassador Apakan for his leadership and tireless work together with his dedicated team of monitors. Your work takes place in an increasingly difficult and even hostile

environment. It is unacceptable that the SMM is deliberately impeded from establishing and reporting facts in accordance with its mandate, and that monitors are threatened and intimidated – primarily in non-government-controlled areas. The security of the SMM must be the highest priority for all OSCE participating States, and the responsibility for it lies with those in effective control of the area in which the SMM operates. We urge Russia to exercise its influence over the separatists it backs to put an end to the restrictions and intimidation and to ensure accountability. The SMM must have full, safe and unhindered access throughout Ukraine, including to the Ukraine-Russia state border. The fatal incident of 23 April near Pryshyb, where the OSCE for the first time had to mourn the death of a colleague who was killed on duty, is still very much on our minds and must serve as a stark reminder that it is the responsibility of all participating States to ensure the safety and security of the SMM. We reiterate our strong support to all steps necessary for a thorough and impartial investigation and the need to bring those responsible to justice. With every passing day, the evidence further degrades. We look forward to the results of the internal audit and external forensic investigation as soon as possible.

We welcome that through the organisation of mirror patrols the SMM was able to assist in creating conditions to enable repair and maintenance work for critical civilian infrastructure such as the high voltage lines between Mykhailivka and Almanza in non-government controlled territory. This power line had been down since 2014 and its repair will improve the quality of electricity for around 150,000 people.

Ambassador Sajdik, we highly appreciate your valuable work in the Trilateral Contact Group, aiming at advancing the implementation of the Minsk agreements and at finding solutions to pressing issues on the ground. In this context, we would like to underline the need to achieve concrete progress in all four thematic areas of the TCG. While some positive steps could be agreed to sustain water supplies in the Karbonit system, the issues of pensions and social payments for citizens living in the non-government-controlled area, as well as gas and electricity deliveries remain largely unresolved. In the working group on political matters, 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 also urge

the sides to move forward on the release of hostages and illegally detained persons. The completion of the attestation mechanism is a step in the right direction. In order to advance on security issues it is now crucial to build on the recent positive trend in the number of ceasefire violations as a result of the "harvest ceasefire" and to bring the number of ceasefire violations to zero, resume disengagement, and the withdrawal of Minsk-proscribed weapons, and to ensure effective mine action.

We remain concerned about increased reports of the threat to the civilian population on both sides of the line of contact from environmental damage as a result of the ongoing conflict. The SMM has repeatedly drawn attention to the damaged South Donbas Water Pipeline. We urge both sides to work with the SMM and the JCCC to facilitate a ceasefire and establish a security zone and allow the vital repair work to take place. If key environmental issues are not addressed, it could lead to severe casualties and long-term damage to the region, a high financial burden, and further impact on the already suffering local population.

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, 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.