



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council N° 1203
Vienna, 22 November 2018**

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

Mr. Chairperson, the conflict in eastern Ukraine is in its fifth year and civilians continue to pay the highest price. On 8 November a man in his sixties tragically lost his life near the Zolote disengagement area, where no shooting should be taking place. In the last weeks, we have repeatedly called on the sides to disengage in the Zolote area and we continue to do so. Tensions remain high and the SMM continues to record ceasefire violations inside and around the zone. The Mission reports not only about continued military presence, but also about expansion of positions in the Zolote disengagement area in clear disrespect of prior agreements. On 8 November the SMM registered 15 undetermined explosions only 1km from its position in Zolote-5/Mykhailivka despite security guarantees. Ceasefire violations and strengthening of military presence inside the disengagement areas run contrary to the disengagement envisioned by the TCG Framework Decision on Disengagement of Forces and Hardware and we strongly urge the sides to adhere to their commitments.

The SMM and its assets remain the target of severe impediments. In addition to restrictions posed by mines and unexploded ordnance, including in the disengagement areas, the SMM’s freedom of movement was restricted 29 times. All but two were restrictions by Russia-backed armed formations. We strongly condemn any actions that put the SMM monitors in danger and reiterate that the SMM should be given free, unimpeded, safe and secure access throughout

Ukraine including the Crimean Peninsula and along the Ukraine-Russia state border.

Regrettably, we are still to receive a substantial explanation from the Russian Federation regarding the downing of the SMM LR UAV on 27 October close to the Ukraine-Russia border. We once again underline that the operational, security and financial consequences of all obstructions must be assessed. Those responsible for any willful damage, destruction or loss of SMM UAVs and other assets should be held accountable, both politically and financially.

Mr. Chairperson, allow us also to reiterate that by supporting the so-called “elections” that took place on 11 November in violation of international and Ukrainian law and of the Minsk agreements, the Russian Federation is undermining efforts to reaching a sustainable political solution to the conflict in eastern Ukraine in accordance with the Minsk agreements.

We remain profoundly concerned about Russia’s ongoing militarization of the Kerch Strait and the Sea of Azov and the excessive inspections causing delays to commercial ships. This together with the militarization of the Crimean Peninsula has a severe negative impact on the entire Black Sea region and beyond. We underline our support for Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, including its territorial waters.

We strongly encourage the sides to pursue another exchange of detainees before the end of 2018. It would represent an important alleviation for those civilians who are missing their relatives and could be an important confidence building measure as the exchange of detainees between the sides that took place at the end of 2017 was.

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. 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.

