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EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council N° 1178
Vienna, 8 March 2018**

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

We strongly condemn the incident that took place on 5 March near a checkpoint in non-government controlled Kozatske, where a man in military-style clothing pointed his rifle directly at the SMM vehicle and threatened to shoot at the SMM if the patrol came any closer. This level of intimidation of our monitors, which occurs frequently, brazenly and aggressively is unacceptable. The overwhelming majority of instances take place in areas held by Russia-backed separatists. Such behavior must stop immediately and the SMM must be allowed safe, secure and unhindered access throughout Ukraine including along the Ukrainian-Russian border. We urge Russia to exercise its influence over the separatists it backs to put an end to the restrictions and intimidation. Accountability must be ensured.

At the same time, the security situation along the line of contact remains very volatile. During the period 19-25 February the SMM recorded a surge in ceasefire violations and a fourfold increase in the use of Minsk-proscribed weapons compared with the previous reporting period. As we have stated repeatedly, the failure to respect the ceasefire and implement the Minsk agreements severely threatens civilians living close to the contact line. We are particularly concerned about the continuous firing to and from populated areas, the presence and use of heavy weapons in and close to populated areas and the targeting of civilian infrastructure, including schools, kindergartens, hospitals, and public premises. We therefore welcome the recommitment in the Trilateral Contact Group to a full ceasefire as of 5 March and we strongly urge the sides to actively follow-up by implementing on the ground what has been agreed. It is disappointing to see continuing reports that the ceasefire is being violated.

Too many times, we have seen the sides use a relatively calm period that has followed a recommitment to the ceasefire to fortify their positions rather than disengage and have seen a recommitment to the ceasefire replaced by increased fighting after only a few weeks. We therefore call on the sides to ensure that respect for the ceasefire be accompanied by the withdrawal of all Minsk-proscribed weapons and complete disengagement. 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. Respect for these fundamental principles must be restored.

We remain concerned about the limited number of entry-exit checkpoints and the poor conditions of the checkpoint in Stanytsia Luhanska where 6.000 people cross every day. The slippery ramp of the pedestrian bridge poses a severe hazard to civilians who are dependent on it and we urge the sides to commence without further delay the reconstruction of the bridge. We also call for the opening of additional crossing points notably at Zolote and Schastia, which would greatly alleviate the suffering of civilians living in these areas.

The conflict continues to cause damage to civilian infrastructure and we regret interruption of service of the mobile operator "Vodafone-Ukraine" in non-government controlled Donetsk. This impacts negatively on civilians in those areas and hampers the work of humanitarian actors and the SMM. In this vein and bearing in mind that one of the roles of the JCCC is to facilitate repair to essential civilian infrastructure we reiterate our call on the Russian Federation to return to the JCCC, calling also on Russia and Ukraine to re-establish the functionality of the JCCC and to strengthen cooperation within its framework.

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 the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of 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.