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EU Statement on the Security situation in and around Ukraine

The EU and its Member States are gravely concerned about the increased tensions in the Azov Sea, in the Black Sea, and in the Kerch Strait, after the Russian naval vessels opened fire against Ukrainian naval vessels on 25 November, as the latter were attempting to pass through the Kerch strait. Six Ukrainians were reportedly injured and all 23 have been detained while three Ukrainian vessels have been seized by the Russian Federation. We strongly condemn the military build-up and the aggressive actions by the Russian Federation, which are further violations of international law and norms, as well as of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. They must stop immediately. We call on the Russian Federation to release the captured vessels, their crew and equipment unconditionally and without delay. We call for restraint and de-escalation.

We reiterate that by supporting the illegal so-called "elections" 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 deeply concerned about the volatile security situation in the conflict zone. In the period of 12-18 November alone, the SMM recorded about 6,900 ceasefire violations, and even though this is a slight decrease compared with the previous week, it is a clear sign that the situation remains unpredictable with severe repercussions for the civilians living in the conflict zone. Sadly, the SMM continues to report about civilian casualties and observe damage in residential areas. Civilians in the vicinity of the contact line are not only facing threats to their lives and damage to their property, they also suffering from damage to critical infrastructure while living without heating or electricity. This is highly disturbing and particularly worrying with the winter approaching.

We repeat our condemnation of any impediments to the SMM's freedom of movement as well as interference with the Mission's technical equipment. While 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 Ukraine-Russia border, we reiterate our condemnation of the ongoing systematic restrictions to the SMM's work, occurring predominantly in areas controlled by Russia-backed armed formations. The SMM was again denied access to areas of southern Donetsk region, including Zaichenko, Bezimenne, Novolaspa and Verkhnoшыrokyvske, as well as to Leonove and Novoazovsk - two areas near the border with the Russian Federation.

These impediments should be seen also in the context of the limited access of the SMM to the uncontrolled Ukrainian-Russian state border. Comprehensive monitoring of the border by the SMM continues to be hindered by the refusal of those in control of these area to provide security guarantees for the SMM to open forward patrol bases near the border. In the absence of these, the SMM continues to be able to conduct only short visits to the border areas, because of lengthy travel times, poor road conditions, adverse weather and limited hours of daylight. We repeat that the SMM including its technical equipment must be assured safe, secure and unimpeded access throughout Ukraine, including the Crimean peninsula and along the Ukraine-Russia border.

Madame Chairperson, on 22 November, the 81st Russian Convoy entered Ukrainian territory at the Donetsk Border Crossing Point, as reported by the OSCE Observer Mission. We deeply regret that, once again, this happened without a full inspection by the Ukrainian border guards and in violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity. This does little to allay concerns about the possible military nature of the transported cargo.

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 to the conflict in line with OSCE principles and commitments. Respect for these principles and commitments must be restored. We underline Russia's responsibility in this regard and once again call on Russia to use its considerable influence over the armed formations it backs to meet these commitments in full. We reiterate our deep concern regarding information about the presence of military equipment and personnel from Russia in the conflict zone. We call on Russia to immediately stop providing financial and military support to the armed formations. The ceasefire must be respected. All Minsk-regulated weapons must be withdrawn. All

foreign armed formations, military equipment and mercenaries must be removed from Ukraine. Re-establishing full Ukrainian control over its state border is essential.

We recall our unwavering support to the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders, and call 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 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. We express our deep concern about the ongoing large-scale militarisation of the Crimean peninsula by Russia, which continues to impact the security situation in the Black Sea region and beyond.

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 UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA and ANDORRA align themselves with this statement.

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