



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council N° 1177
Vienna, 1 March 2018**

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

Mr. Chairperson, during the last couple of weeks the SMM has reported several incidents putting at risk the lives of our monitors and their technical equipment. We are gravely concerned that in the evening of 23 February eight SMM staff at the Forward Patrol Base in government-controlled Popasna had to seek shelter in the basement due to outgoing mortar rounds only 500 meters away. Because of the incident, the SMM needed to relocate its monitors and is again prevented from observing possible ceasefire violations in this hot spot area.

Since the beginning of 2018, there have been a total of 13 incidents of small arms fire directed at SMM UAVs. On 16 February shots were fired from the vicinity of a so-called “LPR” position near Sentianivka, after which the SMM lost contact with the device. Two hours later so-called “LPR” members returned the UAV to the SMM with a bullet hole through one of its motors. On 21 February a UAV was shot at near government-controlled Kostiantynivka. We strongly condemn any threats directed towards our monitors as well as destruction of their technical equipment and recall that the mandate calls for full, safe and unhindered access throughout Ukraine including along the Ukrainian-Russian border and on the Crimean peninsula.

SMM freedom of movement was restricted 22 times which is twice as often as in the previous reporting period. 21 of these incidences happened in areas held by Russia-backed separatists. As in the previous two weeks, so-called “DPR” members conditioned and delayed SMM passage at a checkpoint on road H15 east of non-government-controlled Kremynets while the SMM also continued to experience denials of access to Siedove near the border with the Russian Federation. This has been the case for almost a year now and happened again on 13 February where three so-called “DPR” members told the SMM that they were under orders not to let

them access. This is in clear violation of the SMM's mandate. Without proper and unimpeded monitoring by the SMM, there cannot be a verified improvement of the security situation, which is the key to further progress on the political track of the peace process.

Civilians continue to bear the brunt of the conflict and its immediate consequences. During the last reporting period two civilians were shot in separate incidents – one in government-controlled Hranitne and one in non-government-controlled Spartak – both on 12 February. We deplore any civilian casualties. This happens because the ceasefire is not respected and heavy weapons are not withdrawn. We call on all sides to cease hostilities, disengage and ensure comprehensive action on mine clearance in accordance with the Minsk agreements. In addition we call on those in effective control of the non-government controlled areas to restore the Vodafone mobile network. Problems with communication lines across the line of contact have severe consequences for civilians as well as humanitarian organizations working in the area.

We reiterate our concerns over Russia's withdrawal from the JCCC. Due to this unilateral step, a number of important repair works have been stalled due to a lack of security guarantees in areas outside government control. We reiterate our call on the Russian Federation to return to the JCCC. We also call on Russia and Ukraine to re-establish the functionality of the JCCC and to strengthen cooperation within its framework.

We welcome the Ukrainian presidential administration's swift action in condemning the incidents on 17 February, as reported by the SMM, at the Russian Centre for Science and Culture in Kyiv as unacceptable and we expect investigations to be pursued and perpetrators to be prosecuted.

On 22 February yet another so-called "humanitarian convoy" from Russia entered into Ukrainian territory at the Donetsk Border Crossing Point. It was the 72nd of its kind. The SMM observed the convoy later in the day entering a compound in Luhansk city but was blocked by two armed men who stated that the SMM would not be allowed to enter the compound because it had not co-ordinated in advance. Mr. Chairperson, these so-called "humanitarian convoys" without the consent of the Ukrainian authorities clearly violate Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and fundamental international humanitarian principles. The Minsk agreements foresee

that humanitarian aid will be delivered through an international mechanism. An agreement on this in the Humanitarian Working Group remains crucial.

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. Restoring respect for these principles is crucial. 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 UKRAINE, 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.