



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council No 1164
Vienna, 16 November 2017**

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

Chairperson, we deeply regret that we once again are seeing a steady deterioration of the security situation in the conflict area in breach of the word and spirit of the Minsk agreements. Armed violence is once again on the increase while disengagement remains stalled with the SMM recording numerous ceasefire violations inside or in close proximity to disengagement areas. The overall number of ceasefire violations recorded now equals the level before the recommitment to ceasefire on 25 August. Such an increase has severe consequences for civilians especially for those approximately 800.000 civilians living within 5km on either sides of the contact line. Examples of the consequences for civilians are the five civilian casualties corroborated by the SMM in Donetsk city – four injured and one killed due to unexploded ordnance (UXO) and shelling – and the observed multiple impact sites and damages caused by heavy weapons to essential infrastructure at the Donetsk Filtration Station and a water reservoir near Yasynuvata. On November 5 in Donetsk city an only 9 year old boy lost his life because of an exploding piece of ordnance while doing what children are supposed to do: playing in the playground of their school. His two friends sustained injuries and were in shock due to having watched their friend die. Also in Donetsk city, in the late evening of 3 November, a young woman sustained a gunshot wound in her foot in the yard of her very own house and an elderly man, while being in his own kitchen, was injured by shrapnel. The EU strongly condemns the increased level of violence and we reiterate our concern for the human suffering that the conflict continues to cause. We call on all sides to ensure full implementation of the ceasefire on the ground.

The increased presence of heavy weapons, which according to the Minsk agreements should have been withdrawn, is alarming. The blasts and fragmentation of these weapons can kill, injure or damage anyone or anything within their wide impact zone and they add to the general volatility on the ground. The link between a doubling of their number and a general deterioration of the overall security situation is clearly identifiable. Restraint, renewed impetus in disengagement and withdrawal of heavy weapons to verified storage areas is urgently needed to reduce the risk of further escalation in violence. As underlined by Mr. Hug in his security briefing on November 13th, withdrawal of heavy weapons is a key stabilizing factor and we call on parties to implement their commitments in this regard.

We remain concerned that the SMM continues to face significant access restrictions and obstruction of their monitoring especially in areas close to the Ukrainian-Russian border in clear violation of their mandate. Active denial of their access continues to take place primarily in Russia backed separatist-held areas. In addition, as pointed out by Deputy Chief-Monitor Alexander Hug during his briefing on Monday, the number of serious incidents such as explosions in close vicinity of the SMM, has doubled over recent months and now take place almost once a week. We thus remind all participating states once again that the mandate of the SMM allows for safe, secure and unimpeded access throughout Ukraine, including along the Ukrainian-Russian border and Crimea. We call on the sides to ensure a safe and conducive environment for the SMM to fulfil its mandate. It is in Russia's power to end restrictions imposed in areas currently outside the control of the Ukrainian Government. We urge the JCCC to step up and respond rapidly and effectively when called upon by the SMM to address impediments facing the Mission. Without proper and unimpeded monitoring by the SMM, the implementation of the Mission's mandate related to Minsk tasking is not possible. The SMM provides an essential source of objective reporting to verify the reality on the ground which is paramount for progress on the political track.

Chairperson, the European Union remains deeply concerned about the human rights situation in the illegally annexed Crimea and Sevastopol, as we have reiterated under other agenda points in this meeting. In this connection, we welcome the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly Third Committee on November 14 of the resolution on the human rights situation in the

Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol. This is an important signal by the international community.

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. Respect for these fundamental principles must be restored. 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 urge 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 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.