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EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation N°911
Vienna, 27 March 2019**

EU Statement on the Security Situation in and around Ukraine

The EU and its Member States are deeply concerned about the volatile security situation in the conflict zone. We deeply regret that the recommitment to the ceasefire on the occasion of the International Women's Day which came into effect on 8 March lasted only three days and thus did not lead to significant reduction in armed violence. This is highly disturbing also in the context of the SMM's reports about continued damage in and near populated areas and critical civilian infrastructure, in particular in government-controlled Chermalyk, around the Zolote disengagement area and in the north west of non-government-controlled Donetsk city centre where the SMM observed pieces of UXO of MLRS. The lack of progress on disengagement and the deteriorating security situation in and around Zolote disengagement area, as well as the presence of mines and unexploded ordnance along the contact line further add to our concerns. The SMM continued to observe explosive devices along the contact line, including mines on the side of a road frequently used by civilians and UXO in populated areas - despite the recent mine explosion which killed two civilians and injured another close to the contact line near non-government-controlled Olenivka. We once again reiterate our call on all sides to disengage, withdraw heavy weapons and step up efforts on comprehensive mine action, in order to ensure a comprehensive and lasting ceasefire as an important step toward a sustainable political solution in line with OSCE principles and commitments.

We strongly condemn shooting at SMM mini UAVs near government-controlled Pervomaisk and near non-government-controlled Manuilivka on 12 March. We strongly condemn the ongoing restrictions to the SMM's freedom of movement and

impediments to fulfilment of its mandate, occurring predominantly in areas controlled by Russia-backed armed formations. The SMM continued to face restrictions again in non-government-controlled areas of southern Donetsk region, where it was denied passage at a checkpoint north of Zaichenko, as well as at a checkpoint west of Verkhnohshyrovkivske. Since June 2018, the Russia-backed armed formations have denied the SMM passage through these two checkpoints over 160 times. We also regret that the sides continued to deny the SMM full access to the three disengagement areas. These systematic restrictions considerably hinder the SMM's monitoring activity and raise profound suspicions about what is being hidden from the SMM. We repeat that the SMM and its technical assets must have full, safe and unhindered access throughout Ukraine. This includes the areas along the Ukraine-Russia state border and the Crimean peninsula. We strongly condemn any attempts to restrict the SMM's freedom of movement or impede the fulfilment of its mandate. In this context we are deeply concerned by the presence of highly sophisticated Russian jamming system (R-330Zh, Zhitel) and a radio-electronic jamming complex (Tirada-2) near Yuzhna-Lomuvatka controlled by Russia-backed armed formations as observed by the SMM on 16 March. This observation is worrying in the context of the continued jamming of the SMM's long-range UAVs. We therefore ask again the delegation of the Russian Federation to explain the presence of these highly sophisticated Russian systems in eastern Ukraine.

Our position on the incident at the Kerch Strait on 25 November 2018 and its negative impact in the Azov Sea and Russia's violations of international law is well known. Russia's aggressive actions also affect the security situation in the entire Black Sea region. We strongly call on Russia to release the crew members and return their vessels unconditionally and without delay. We expect Russia to ensure unhindered and free passage through the Kerch Strait to and from the Azov Sea, in accordance with international law.

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 REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA, ANDORRA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

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