



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1221 Vienna, 28 March 2019

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

Mr. Chairperson, we regret that the 8 March recommitment to ceasefire became the shortest lived reduction in the use of weapons following renewed commitments to cease fire since June 2017. We urge the sides to do more, finally abide by their commitments and bring fighting to a complete halt. We remain deeply worried about the continued fragile situation in and around the disengagement areas. Ceasefire violations were recorded in all of them and military presence was observed inside Zolote and Petrivske disengagement areas. Also residential areas in Zolote came under fire of heavy weapons. SMM reporting again shows that civilians and in particular children suffer the most from the consequences of the fighting. On 11 March, in non-government controlled Zolote 5, a settlement just east of the disengagement area, the SMM saw freshly damaged windows of a functioning school building, assessed as caused by small-arms fire. This is the sixth time that the school has been damaged by small-arms fire since late December 2018. We strongly condemn that the lives of children are put at risk and that they are prevented from having a normal childhood. While we welcome Ukraine’s intention to open the Zolote Entry Exit Check Point, it is important for the necessary conditions to be met for a safe crossing. An agreement on such opening should be found, the ceasefire respected, disengagement commitments should be fully implemented, and mines as well as other hazards for civilians removed.

Lives of civilians are also put at risk due to the persistence of mines including new ones. The SMM continued to observe explosive devices along the contact line,

including mines on the side of a road frequently used by civilians, unexploded ordnance (UXOs) in populated areas and anti-tank mines near an entry-exit checkpoint. The SMM also observed newly-laid anti-tank mines on both sides of the contact line. The mines pose a serious threat not only to civilians but also the SMM monitors and we strongly condemn laying of new mines and urge immediate and comprehensive demining. We further urge the sides to disengage and withdraw heavy weapons which together with comprehensive demining are fundamental prerequisites for a permanent and sustainable ceasefire.

We have repeatedly called for safe, secure and unhindered access for the SMM in accordance with their mandate, which we have all signed up to. This includes the illegally annexed Crimean peninsula and the Ukraine-Russia state border to which the SMM is systematically denied access. Russia backed armed formations also deny access persistently at checkpoints. Since June 2018, members of the armed formations have denied the SMM passage through checkpoints near Zaichenko over 100 times and near Verkhnohshyrokivske over 60 times. These systematic restrictions considerably hinder the SMM's monitoring activity.

During the latest reporting period, SMM technical assets were regrettably once again the target of small arms fire and jamming. We strongly condemn shooting at SMM UAVs, on both sides of the contact line near government-controlled Pervomaisk and near non-government controlled Manuilivka on 12 March, as well as shooting with an anti-aircraft gun at the Long Range UAV in the vicinity of Dovhe, an area held by Russia backed armed formations. We reiterate that the operational, security and financial consequences of all obstructions of SMM UAVs must be assessed. We are deeply concerned about the losses which have a substantial negative impact on the operational effectiveness of the SMM. Those responsible for any willful damage, destruction or loss of SMM UAVs and other assets should be held accountable, both politically and financially.

Our position on the unjustified use of force by Russia 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. 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. The increasing militarization of Crimea continues to impact negatively the security situation in the Black Sea region.

Mr. Chairman, the EU is concerned about reports on house searches in the illegally annexed Crimean peninsula with subsequent detentions. As stated in the Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on 17 March, since the illegal annexation by the Russian Federation 5 years ago, the human rights situation in the Crimean peninsula has significantly deteriorated. Residents of the peninsula face systematic restrictions of fundamental freedoms and the rights of Crimean Tatars have been gravely violated. The EU expects Russia to end the pressure on the Crimean Tatar community.

The EU remains firm in its 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. We call on Russia to fully assume its responsibility in this regard and to use its considerable influence over the armed formations it backs to meet the Minsk commitments in full. Respect for these principles and commitments must be restored. We again call on Russia to immediately stop fuelling the conflict by providing financial and military support to the armed formations, and we remain deeply concerned about information on the presence of Russian military equipment and personnel in areas held by Russia-backed armed formations. 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 uphold 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. The European Union will remain committed to fully

implement its non-recognition policy, including through restrictive measures.

The Candidate Countries 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 and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

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