

**EUROPEAN UNION****OSCE Permanent Council N° 1168****Vienna, 14 December 2017**

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

Mr. Chairperson, last week, during the Ministerial Council here in Vienna, the crisis in and around Ukraine remained at the top of the OSCE’s agenda. And rightly so. A majority of Ministers expressed their deep concern for the situation in eastern Ukraine and in the illegally-annexed Crimean peninsula and reaffirmed their support for the Minsk process. They also restated the need to restore respect for OSCE core principles. It was therefore all the more regrettable that we were not able to find consensus on a Ministerial Declaration on the crisis in and around Ukraine.

While we were all gathered at the Ministerial Council the situation in conflict areas in eastern Ukraine continued to deteriorate. Ceasefire violations rose, the use of heavy weapons intensified and the SMM observed more weapons in violation of withdrawal lines. This is the case particularly in areas held by Russia-backed separatists including along the Ukrainian-Russian State border. In the Avdiivka-Yasynuvata-Donetsk airport area alone, ceasefire violations increased by about 120 per cent compared with the week before, amounting to the highest number recorded in a week in this area since February 2017. Ceasefire violations were also observed inside the Strysh Luhanska and Petrivske disengagement areas. Indeed, apart from temporary decreases in ceasefire violations, the security situation has remained volatile and worrying for most of the year. We reiterate our call on all sides to show restraint and swiftly disengage, respect the ceasefire, verifiably withdraw all Minsk-proscribed weapons and ensure humanitarian access.

We condemn the continued restrictions that the SMM face primarily in areas outside of government control. Last week, in addition to restrictions related to the observed or potential presence of mines and unexploded ordnance, the SMM was impeded 17

times including at permanent storage sites and heavy weapons holding areas thus hindering the Mission's efforts to verify withdrawal of weapons. They were also denied access to checkpoints in areas near the border with the Russian Federation. We urge the JCCC to respond rapidly and effectively when called upon by the SMM to address impediments facing the Mission.

Earlier this week Mr. Pokas, SMM Head of Operations, provided a briefing on the SMM's plans to improve its technical monitoring tools in use and those that could be further developed. We share his indication that the goal of the SMM using technical monitoring tools is to maximise situational awareness, including monitoring of remote areas, increase coverage in terms of time and space in order to implement the SMM mandate more effectively. We underline that technology alone cannot replace human monitoring although it can help reduce security risks to the monitors. Security conditions have to be in place in order for technical equipment to work. We thus reiterate our call on the sides to secure full, safe and unhindered access for the SMM and its technical equipment throughout Ukraine including along the Ukrainian-Russian border.

We welcome the briefing by Ambassador Varga on Tuesday on the work of the Border Observation Mission. As repeatedly stated, we would like to see a significant expansion of the Observer Mission to all border crossings currently not under control of the Ukrainian government, as well as the areas in between. We reaffirm that effective and comprehensive OSCE monitoring of the Russian-Ukrainian border is an integral part of steps towards a sustainable political solution, which fully upholds OSCE principles, and would be in line with the provisions of the Minsk agreements. The re-establishment of Ukrainian control over its sovereign territory including the state border, is absolutely crucial. We therefore deeply regret that the Russian Federation continues to prevent a meaningful expansion of the Observer mission and its equipment.

We regret that so-called "humanitarian convoys" from Russia continue to enter Ukrainian territory; the sixty-ninth of its kind passing through on 23 November at the Donetsk Border Crossing Point. This occurs without the consent of the Ukrainian authorities and in clear violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and without fundamental international humanitarian principles being observed. The Minsk

package foresees that humanitarian aid will be delivered through an international mechanism. An agreement on this in the humanitarian working group remains crucial.

The humanitarian toll of the conflict persists. Civilians face undue hardships that are further compounded by additional difficulties at the onset of winter. We welcome the repair work done to the wooden ramp at the Stanytsia Luhanska bridge as a first step which will allow thousands of people to move more safely. However, more has to be done here and it will not solve the overall woes of civilians in eastern Ukraine. We therefore call on all sides to urgently put the necessary conditions in place to allow for the opening of the crossing point at Zolote, as well as work together to reach agreement on the opening of additional crossing points in Luhansk, and respect the established technical safety zones around critical infrastructure.

We continue to hear reports of severe restrictions on fundamental freedoms in separatist-held areas and in Crimea, where the representatives of the Crimean Tatar community and the self-governing body Mejlis continue to face systematic persecution. This is a gross violation of human rights and we call once again upon the Russian Federation to stop such persecutions and to immediately release all persons arrested and charged for expressing dissenting views, including regarding the status of Crimea, on the Crimean peninsula and in Russia.

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. All Minsk-regulated weapons must be withdrawn and foreign armed formations, military equipment and mercenaries removed from Ukraine. 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 recognized 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 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.