



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Permanent Council No. 1220 Vienna, 14 March 2019

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

Mr. Chairperson, we echo others in welcoming the recommitment to the ceasefire agreed in the Trilateral Contact Group last week, which came into effect on 8 March. It led to some temporary reduction in ceasefire violations. This shows that improvements on the ground are achievable if political will is there. However, we regret the resurgence of fighting in the following days, as the SMM still recorded explosions and small-arms fire, including in the vicinity of the Zolote disengagement area, after the ceasefire had come into effect and we urge sides to do more – to fully adhere to a lasting ceasefire and bring fighting to a complete halt. We further urge the sides to disengage, withdraw heavy weapons and embark on comprehensive demining which are all prerequisites for a permanent and sustainable ceasefire.

The presence of mines and UXOs continues to prevent the Mission from patrolling several areas along the contact line, including critical routes, and substantially impede the free movement of civilians crossing the contact line. Moreover, mines and UXOs pose a severe threat to the lives of SMM monitors and civilians. Last week the SMM reported about a man who had lost both lower limbs and suffered an eye injury in an UXO explosion on his way to work. We reiterate our strong condemnation of lack of demining and the laying of new mines, and we urge sides to start a complete demining without further delay.

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 Ukraine-Russia state border and illegally annexed Crimea. Regrettably, impediments continue and we are alarmed that on 3 March in Pikuzy, an area held by Russia-backed armed formations, the SMM was not only denied access but once again also verbally threatened by members of the armed formations. We strongly condemn any threats against SMM monitors or attempts to intimidate them and call on the Russian Federation to use its considerable influence it has on the armed formations it backs to put an immediate end to these incidents. In this context, we once again reiterate our call on Russia to return to the JCCC, from which it withdrew on 18 December 2017, and to restore its functionality. The JCCC in its original set-up played an important role with regards to securing the safety of SMM monitors and contributing to immediate resolution of impediments encountered by SMM patrols. 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 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.

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\*, and the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

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