



EUROPEAN UNION

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**EU Statement on Russia's Ongoing Aggression against
Ukraine and Violations of OSCE Principles and Commitments**

The European Union welcomes the Foreign Ministers' meeting in the Normandy Format in Paris on 3 March. We urge the Trilateral Contact Group and subordinate Working Groups to build on it by making tangible progress towards a sustainable political solution in line with OSCE principles and commitments.

As a first step, action by all sides is needed to halt the deteriorating security situation, ensure full military disengagement and consolidate the ceasefire. We also reiterate our call on all sides to unconditionally and verifiably withdraw all Minsk-regulated weapons and to cooperate fully with the SMM. The past few days have regrettably witnessed further casualties and the use of heavy weapons. Moreover, the SMM continues to observe heavy weapons in civilian areas, including 11 main battle tanks stationed in a residential area of Donetsk city. The establishment by April 30 of an Incident Prevention Response Mechanism, to identify and address security concerns by any party in a timely manner, as decided by the N4 Foreign ministers in Paris last week is a concrete step to help to sustain the cease-fire.

Despite the fact that the ceasefire should have started on 15 February 2015, we still witness continuous shootings. A genuine ceasefire is not only crucial to preventing further casualties and improving conditions for vital humanitarian relief, it is also indispensable for local elections in certain parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. In this regard, we echo the words by Chairperson-in-Office Frank-Walter Steinmeier in Paris: "Das ist eine zentrale Voraussetzung - ohne Sicherheit kann es keine Wahlen geben". We call on the sides in the Political Working Group to agree without delay on the modalities of such local elections in accordance with Ukrainian legislation, relevant OSCE standards and to be monitored by ODIHR. Established conditions for

ODIHR observation must be met, including ensuring security and access for ODIHR. We also take note of the call from the Normandy Format Meeting in Paris on the OSCE to propose by 31 March options for providing adequate security for these local elections.

Full implementation of the Minsk agreements requires that SMM has full, safe and unhindered access throughout Ukraine, including along the Ukrainian-Russian State border. Yet considerable restrictions continue, especially in Russia-backed separatist-held areas. Despite repeated assurances of cooperation, SMM patrols are still denied passage or delayed in separatist-held areas by armed men citing orders from superiors. SMM UAVs are also frequently targeted by jamming. This is unacceptable. All restrictions by all sides must be lifted without further delay.

The crisis in Ukraine continues to take a significant toll on the civilian population, as documented in a recent report by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. The humanitarian situation is particularly dire for the 2.7 million civilians living in separatist-held areas. Moreover, the report finds a regular disregard on both sides of the line of contact of the principle of distinction between civilians and those taking active part in hostilities. OHCHR also documented allegations of enforced disappearances, arbitrary and incommunicado detention, and torture and ill-treatment by both sides. In the absence of rule of law, people living in separatist-held areas are particularly vulnerable. Finally, the report also describes the deteriorating human rights situation in Crimea since the illegal annexation of the peninsula by the Russian Federation. In particular, the report emphasises that the imposition of the citizenship and the legislative framework of the Russian Federation has affected human rights in Crimea, especially for ethnic Ukrainians, minority groups and indigenous peoples, such as Crimean Tartars, who face intimidation and persecution.

The European Union remains firm in its call on all parties to swiftly and fully implement the Minsk agreements and honour their commitments. We underline Russia's responsibility in this regard and also yet again call on Russia to use its considerable influence over the separatists it backs to meet their commitments. The duration of the EU's economic sanctions against Russia is linked to the complete implementation of the Minsk agreements. The ceasefire must be respected. All heavy

weapons must be withdrawn and foreign armed formations, military equipment and mercenaries removed from Ukraine. Re-establishing full Ukrainian control over its state border is essential. We reiterate our concern about reports – including the latest report of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights – regarding the presence of military equipment and personnel from Russia.

Mr Chair, the European Union recalls its unwavering support to the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence of Ukraine, and calls upon Russia to do likewise. We urge Russia to recognise these fundamental principles that it has itself invoked many times, to contribute, by acts and public pronouncements, to stabilise the situation and to 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 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, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

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