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EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council N° 1173
Vienna, 25 January 2017**

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

Mr. Chairperson, regrettably the situation on the ground is once again deteriorating. It is of deep concern that the SMM is again recording armed violence at levels similar to the weeks prior to the 23 December recommitment to the cease fire. The use of heavy weapons is also on the rise and the SMM has recorded a significant number of Minsk proscribed weapons in violation of withdrawal lines. The cost of this increase in violence is all too often borne by civilians on a daily basis. This was again sadly demonstrated by the SMM’s reporting of civilian casualties including a fatality on a bus near a check-point at Olenivka on 21 January. We are also concerned over SMM reports stating that the relative calm in December was used to reinforce positions. In areas held by Russia-backed separatists, the SMM for instance observed building of trenches and fortification of positions near Kalynove-Borshchuvate as well as reoccupation of positions previously observed as abandoned near Pryvitne in Luhansk region and in the Petrivske disengagement area. The SMM also spotted the presence of newly extended trenches near a critical water infrastructure near Vasylivka, which connected to existing trenches leading to Ukrainian Armed Forces positions. We strongly urge all sides to cease hostilities immediately as required by the Minsk agreements and swiftly disengage, withdraw all Minsk-proscribed weapons and ensure humanitarian access.

The SMM continues to face restrictions on their freedom of movement and other impediments to fulfilling its mandate by carrying out monitoring and verifying claimed withdrawal of weapons. These restrictions continue to take place primarily in areas held by Russian-backed separatists. An example of unacceptable behaviour towards the SMM occurred on 20 January when a visibly intoxicated so-called “DPR” member

was driving dangerously and then verbally abused the SMM near non-government controlled Sakhanka. We thus once again remind all sides that the mandate of the SMM calls for full, safe and unhindered access throughout Ukraine including along the Ukrainian-Russian border. We further reiterate our call on Russia to return to the JCCC and urge Ukraine and Russia to restore the functionality of the JCCC in order to facilitate inter alia required security guarantees urgently needed for the stagnant repair of civilian infrastructure. It has supported the operations of the SMM and contributed to ensuring the Mission's safety.

We continue to be extremely concerned about the human rights situation in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. On 16 January 2018, Volodymyr Balukh, known to have opposed the illegal annexation of the Crimean peninsula by the Russian Federation, was sentenced to three years and seven months in a penal colony by a court set up by the illegal authorities. Another worrying case is that of Crimean Tatar activist Bekir Dehermendzhy who was detained on 23 November last year in Simferopol on dubious charges. In view of the critical medical condition he suffers, it is essential that he is immediately granted access to appropriate medical care. We reiterate our call for full, free and unhindered access to the peninsula for international human rights observers, and call for the immediate release of all illegally detained Ukrainian citizens in Ukraine, including the illegally-annexed Crimean peninsula and in Russia.

The EU welcomes the additional information given by the Ukrainian ambassador of the new law “on state policy elements to ensure Ukraine’s sovereignty over the temporarily occupied territories in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine”. We reiterate our support for the full implementation of the Minsk agreements as the basis for a peaceful and sustainable resolution of the conflict in eastern Ukraine. We expect Russia and Ukraine to continue their ongoing diplomatic efforts on the resolution of the conflict, notably in the Normandy 4 format and the Trilateral Contact Group, on the basis of the implementation of all relevant commitments.

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. Restoring respect for these principles is crucial. 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 recognised 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, LIECHTENSTEIN 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.