



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No 1134 Vienna, 16 February 2017

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

Although the number of ceasefire violations has declined compared to the recent sharp security deterioration, the European Union remains very concerned by the fragile situation along the line of contact where conditions for yet another escalation remain in place. We are still seeing high levels of violence with regular casualties, concentrations of heavy weapons and armed forces in close proximity across the contact line, significant restrictions on the SMM exacerbating the lack of transparency and distrust and a stalled disengagement process. Moreover, the humanitarian situation remains dire and humanitarian access is highly limited in areas held by Russia-backed separatists. The SMM has confirmed that at least 38 civilian casualties occurred from 29 January to 5 February, of which 8 were fatal. We cannot allow another escalation to continue to exact this humanitarian cost. Against the background of a large explosion in Donetsk city on 14 February, as reported by the SMM, we call on the sides to respect critical civilian infrastructure and welcome the intention to create demilitarized zones around such infrastructure.

We therefore call on the sides to take immediate steps to ensure full respect of the ceasefire, the withdrawal of all Minsk-proscribed weapons, complete disengagement, full, safe and unhindered SMM access – including along the Ukrainian-Russian border - and full humanitarian access in line with international humanitarian principles. We also call on the sides to cooperate fully with the SMM to this end and to utilize the full potential of the JCCC to ensure progress on the ground. These are important steps toward a sustainable political solution in line with OSCE principles and commitments – and respect for these fundamental principles and commitments must be restored.

It is deeply regrettable that the SMM continues to confront severe restrictions. The SMM's access to the Ukrainian-Russian border currently not under the control of the Ukrainian government remains patchy and conditional, and checkpoints set up in separatist-controlled areas further constrain the SMM's ability to effectively monitor developments on the ground. This prevents the SMM from capturing the full picture such as, for instance, on 11 February, when armed men on a separatist-held road north of Lobacheve denied the SMM access into an area with clear signs of military activity. We also deplore the reoccurring intimidation of SMM monitors, including the warning shots fired within 50-100 meters of the SMM's position in separatist-held Pikuzy. Such behaviour is indefensible and must not continue with impunity. The SMM must have full, safe and unhindered access throughout Ukraine and be provided with the necessary baseline information by the sides to verify the withdrawal of Minsk-proscribed weapons. We welcome that a renewed agreement was reached yesterday in Minsk on this issue, and we hope that this can lead to concrete action by the parties. We also again underline the importance of a timely extension of the SMM mandate and that the mission is adequately resourced.

We again call on the sides in the Trilateral Contact Group and its working groups to agree on steps toward the full implementation of the Minsk agreements. This includes the modalities of local elections in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in full accordance with Ukrainian legislation, OSCE standards and monitored by ODIHR. We reiterate our firm position that established conditions for ODIHR monitoring, including ensuring security and access, must first be met. We call on the sides to agree on additional disengagement areas, the release of all hostages and illegally detained persons.

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. We call on Russia to assume its responsibility in this regard 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. We recall that 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 Crimea and 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, and we call again on OSCE participating States to consider similar non-recognition measures in line with the UNGA Resolution 68/262.

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 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.