



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council N° 1197
Vienna, 11 October 2018**

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

Mr. Chairperson, yesterday on 10 October the lives of our monitors were once again put at risk. While monitoring the security situation at the Donetsk Filtration Station in order to facilitate repair works and the rotation of workers at the Station, they heard two bullets flying right over their heads. This happened despite security guarantees having been provided. The EU strongly condemns this act and call on the sides to ensure the safety of the SMM monitors.

Mr. Chairperson, in the last days of September ceasefire violations in eastern Ukraine went up by 71% reaching a total number of 5,600 ceasefire violations in one week. Heavy weapons are observed in violation of agreed withdrawal lines on both sides of the contact line as is expansion of positions, and disengagement regrettably remains stalled. Between 24 and 30 September, the SMM recorded no less than 79 ceasefire violations in the near vicinity of the Zolote pilot disengagement area and observed that positions on both sides of the contact line had moved leaving the forward positions only 500 meters apart. We echo Ambassador Apakan, in stressing that the lack of disengagement, persistent presence of weapons in violation of withdrawal lines, including in residential areas, and the lack of efforts towards disengagement lead to chronic fighting and continue to present a risk of escalation. We strongly reiterate our call on the sides to disengage and withdraw heavy weapons.

Our monitors continue to face systematic restrictions to their freedom of movement. In addition to restrictions posed by mines and UXOs their

freedom of movement was restricted 23 times during the last week of September. All but one of these restrictions happened in areas held by Russia-backed armed formations. We are particularly concerned about the frequent lack of access of the SMM to the southern Donetsk region and areas along the uncontrolled Ukrainian-Russian state border. We continue to condemn all violations of the SMM mandate and recall that SMM staff and their technical equipment must have safe, secure and unimpeded access throughout Ukraine. This includes the Crimean peninsula and the entire stretch of Ukrainian-Russian border along Donbas, currently outside of the control of the Ukrainian government. We are concerned over the frequent reports of jamming of the SMM UAVs on both sides of the line of contact. Any attempts to down or interfere with the UAVs not only pose the risk of damaging the SMM's technical monitoring equipment, but also a threat to monitors themselves. This risk is especially high in case of mini- and mid-range UAVs because of the close proximity of the patrol members to the areas over which the UAVs fly. We repeat that the operational, security and financial consequences of obstructions of their technical equipment must be assessed. The parties responsible for any damage, destruction or loss of SMM UAVs and other assets should be held accountable, including politically and financially.

We commend the work of the SMM's Human Dimension Unit and welcome the analysis the SMM has provided on the impact of the conflict on children and the elderly. We welcome this thematic reporting and look forward to further analysis of the impact that the conflict has had on women and girls.

The EU is concerned about the deteriorating situation in the Azov Sea including reports of interruptions to commercial shipping transiting through the Kerch Strait to and from Ukraine's ports and the militarization of the area. This situation is negatively impacting the commercial activity of vessels passing through the Kerch Strait and in the Sea of Azov, and caused financial damages to the Ukrainian ports of Berdiansk and Marioupol, adding to an already severe and volatile situation. We

ask the SMM to monitor and report about the situation on the ground.

Oleg Sentsov, whose case we have raised repeatedly in this format, has ended his hunger strike after 145 days. The EU continues to consider the case against him to be in breach of international law and elementary standards of justice. We call on the Russian Federation to grant him swift and appropriate medical treatment in an institutionalised medical setting and to release him, along with all illegally detained Ukrainian citizens in Russia and on the Crimean peninsula. International human rights standards on the peninsula must be upheld.

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. Respect for these principles and commitments must be restored. The Minsk Agreements provide for local elections to be held within the framework of the Ukrainian legislation. Any other form of “elections” as announced by the separatists and scheduled for 11 November would contradict the letter and spirit of the Agreements and would thus be considered null and void. These elections should be organized in accordance with Ukrainian legislation, OSCE standards and monitored by ODIHR. 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.

We again call on Russia to immediately stop fueling 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 the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, 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.