

**EUROPEAN UNION****OSCE Permanent Council No. 1218
Vienna, 28 February 2019****EU Statement on “Russia’s Ongoing Aggression against
Ukraine and Illegal Occupation of Crimea”**

Mr. Chairperson, on 23 February we once again saw the fatal consequences of the use of mines in the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. Two people were killed and another one was injured when their car hit a mine close to the contact line near non-government controlled Olenivka. The incident once again illustrates that civilians continue to pay the highest price five years into the conflict. We strongly urge the sides to refrain from laying new mines and embark on comprehensive demining particularly in areas where civilians reside.

Continued fighting on the ground remains a severe threat not only to civilians but also to the SMM monitors. On 26 February an SMM patrol positioned near non-government-controlled Zolote-5/Mykhailivka was monitoring the security situation and ongoing repair works of critical civilian infrastructure when they heard five shots of small-arms fire approximately 200 metres west-north-west of its position, followed by bullets flying 10 metres over their heads, hitting a tree close to the monitors. This is a severe incident that put the six monitors and the six employees of the water company at grave risk despite security guarantees having been provided by the sides. On 18 February, in Donetsk city, two SMM staff members standing outside an SMM residence heard at least two explosions only 100-150 metres away. At the time of the incident other SMM personnel were in the residence. The proximity of such explosions to SMM residences causes grave concern. We condemn these disingenuous threats to SMM and civilians. The incidents have to be followed up by the sides and perpetrators must be held accountable.

We have repeatedly condemned any interference with SMM technical assets. It is a clear violation of the Minsk agreements and it puts our monitors at risk. The deliberate attempts to down or blind the UAVs also raise suspicion about what is

being hidden from the SMM. Nevertheless, attacks on the SMM UAVs continue. During the reporting period, small-arms fire was directed at two SMM UAVs in non-government controlled areas in the Luhansk region and on 18 February, yet another SMM long-range UAV crashed while flying over an area held by Russia-backed armed formations. Immediately before the crash the UAV experienced jamming which caused it to lose its GPS signal before it started spinning uncontrollably and losing altitude. We await further information from the SMM on the causes of the crash. We also reiterate our call on the Russian Federation to provide us with a substantial explanation regarding the downing of the SMM LR UAV on 27 October last year and to hand over the debris. We further reiterate that the operational, security and financial consequences of all obstructions must be assessed. We are deeply concerned about these losses which have a substantial negative impact on the operational effectiveness of the SMM. Those responsible for any wilful damage, destruction or loss of SMM UAVs and other assets should be held accountable, both politically and financially.

The SMM continues to be prevented - particularly by Russia-backed armed formations - from having safe, secure and unimpeded access throughout Ukraine including along the Ukraine-Russia state border and on the illegally annexed Crimean Peninsula. We reiterate our call to put an end to the systematic denial of access to certain border areas, the coastal line east of Mariupol and the Crimean Peninsula.

Lately ceasefire violations have been gradually increasing and disengagement remains unimplemented. Between 11 and 17 February alone, the Mission recorded 84 ceasefire violations inside the Zolote disengagement area and 253 within 5km of its periphery both representing a significant increase from the previous week. Lack of disengagement and lack of withdrawal of heavy weapons are profound obstacles to a permanent ceasefire and to improving security and living conditions for civilians living along the contact line. We strongly urge immediate disengagement and withdrawal of heavy weapons.

We deeply regret that civilians continue to suffer while waiting to pass at the entry-exit checkpoints under strenuous conditions. On 13 February, the SMM corroborated

an additional case of a civilian who had died on 12 February of natural causes while waiting to cross the contact line at a checkpoint of the Russia-backed armed formations in Donetsk region. This brings the total number of people dying while waiting at or passing through entry-exit checkpoints since late December 2018 to 15.

Our position on Russia's violation of international law in the Kerch Strait and Azov Sea on 25 November 2018 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.

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*, 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.

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