



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council N° 1217
Vienna, 14 February 2019**

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

Mr. Chairperson, the security situation in the conflict affected areas remains precarious. We are especially concerned about the continuing deteriorating circumstances in and around the disengagement areas. On 4 February in the Zolote disengagement area alone, an SMM long range UAV observed two infantry fighting vehicles and two anti-aircraft guns as well as three recent craters assessed as impacts of mortar. During the evening and night that followed, the SMM camera in Zolote recorded ten projectiles in flight assessed as inside the disengagement area and ten projectiles assessed as outside the disengagement area. On 5 February, an SMM patrol observed that fighting in close vicinity of the area continued. In addition, the SMM continues to report about heavy weapons in violation of withdrawal lines. On 4 and 5 February, a SMM LR UAV spotted two surface-to-air missile systems in Government controlled area. At the same time a mini UAV flying in an area temporarily held by Russia-backed armed formations, spotted no less than two self-propelled howitzers, four towed howitzers as well as four tanks. The SMM also observed heavy weapons on both side of the contact line beyond withdrawal lines but outside of designated storage sites and numerous indications of military and military-type presence in the security zone. 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 and we strongly urge immediate disengagement and withdrawal of heavy weapons.

We could have a better picture of the situation, however the SMM continues to be impeded from having safe, secure, unconditional and unhindered freedom of movement throughout Ukraine, including Crimea and along the Ukraine-Russia state border. The SMM is denied full access to the three disengagement areas, as well as the ability to travel certain roads previously identified as important for effective

monitoring by the Mission and for civilians' movement, through failure to conduct comprehensive clearance of mines and UXO. The systematic denial of access to certain border areas and the coastal line east of Mariupol raises clear concerns about what is being hidden from the SMM.

The SMM UAVs are also persistently being jammed and interfered with. In this context we 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. We underline that the operational, security and financial consequences of all obstructions must be assessed. Those responsible for any wilful damage, destruction or loss of SMM UAVs and other assets should be held accountable, both politically and financially.

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