



**EUROPEAN UNION**

**OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation N°905  
Vienna, 23 January 2019**

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**EU Statement on the Security Situation in and around  
Ukraine**

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The European Union and its Member States remain deeply concerned over the volatile security situation in the conflict zone. We welcome the recommitment to a permanent ceasefire on the occasion of New Year and Christmas festivities in the TCG starting on 29 December 2018, which has to some extent reduced the level of the use of force. However, we regret that it has not led to a complete halt in violence. On the contrary, several peaks of violence have also been observed over the course of the first half of January. On 13 January, 15 days after the recommitment to the ceasefire, the number of recorded ceasefire violations reached about 760 and in the week of 7-13 January the Mission recorded about 3,500 ceasefire violations.

We deeply regret the negative impact of the unpredictable security situation on the lives of civilians. Despite the significant decrease in the number of civilian casualties in 2018, by more than half compared with 2017, civilians continue to suffer from the conflict. The SMM continues to report about civilian casualties and observe damage to civilian infrastructure and property, as well as presence of military hardware in residential areas close to the contact line, which puts civilians further at risk. This is unacceptable and we reiterate our call on all sides to disengage, withdraw heavy weapons and step up efforts on comprehensive mine action, in order to ensure a comprehensive and lasting ceasefire as an important step toward a sustainable political solution in line with OSCE principles and commitments.

We deplore any impediments to the SMM's freedom of movement as well as interference with the Mission's technical equipment. While we are still to receive a substantial explanation from the Russian Federation regarding the downing of the SMM LR UAV on 27 October close to Ukraine-Russia border, we reiterate our condemnation of the ongoing systematic restrictions to the SMM's work, occurring primarily in areas controlled by Russia-backed armed formations. In the period of 17 December 2018 – 13 January 2019 the Mission was restricted on 37 occasions, out

of which 35 occurred in areas controlled by Russia-backed armed formations. On 24 December, a visibly intoxicated member of the armed formations damaged an SMM vehicle with SMM members inside and verbally abused other SMM members nearby in non-government controlled Khoroshe and on 2 January an SMM patrol was again verbally abused by members of the armed formations near non-government controlled Sofiivka. This intimidation of our civilian monitors is unacceptable and those responsible must be held to account.

We are disturbed not only by the number of restrictions, but also the fact that geographically these restrictions are concentrated in southern Donetsk region, including at checkpoints near non-government-controlled areas of Zaichenko and Novoazovsk, as well as in non-government-controlled areas of Luhansk region close to the border with the Russian Federation. We are concerned about these attempts to hide facts on the ground. This is particularly worrying in the context of the recent dangerous increase in tensions in the Azov Sea and the Kerch Strait which has led to the seizure of Ukrainian vessels and their crews by Russia and shots being fired at them, wounding several Ukrainian servicemen. We are dismayed at this use of force by Russia which, against the backdrop of increasing militarisation in the area, is unacceptable and we call strongly on Russia to release the captured vessels, their crew and equipment unconditionally and without delay. We recall that the SMM staff and their technical equipment must have safe, secure and unimpeded access throughout Ukraine. This includes the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol and the entire stretch of Ukrainian-Russian border along Donbas, currently and temporarily outside of the control of the Ukrainian government.

Mr. Chairman, on 20 December 2018, the 82<sup>nd</sup> Russian Convoy entered Ukrainian territory at the Donetsk Border Crossing Point, as reported by the OSCE Observer Mission. We deeply regret that, once again, this happened without a full inspection by the Ukrainian border guards and in violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity. This does little to allay concerns about the possible military nature of the transported cargo.

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 to the conflict in line with OSCE principles and commitments.

Respect for these principles and commitments must be restored. We underline Russia's responsibility in this regard and once again call on Russia to use its considerable influence over the armed formations it backs to meet these commitments in full. We reiterate our deep concern regarding information about the presence of military equipment and personnel from Russia in the conflict zone. We call on Russia to immediately stop providing financial and military support to the armed formations. The ceasefire must be respected. All Minsk-regulated weapons must be withdrawn. All foreign armed formations, military equipment and mercenaries must be removed from Ukraine. Re-establishing full Ukrainian control over its state border is essential.

We recall our unwavering support to the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders, and call 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 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. We express our deep concern about the ongoing large-scale militarisation of the Crimean peninsula by Russia, which continues to impact the security situation in the Black Sea region and beyond.

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 UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA, ANDORRA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

\* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.