



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council N° 1213
Vienna, 24 January 2019**

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

Mr. Chairperson, let me start out welcoming the decrease in the number of civilian casualties in 2018 compared to 2017, as recently reported. It is, however, alarming that during the last two weeks at least eight civilians died at crossing points due to the long waiting under severe weather conditions as described by the SMM. We strongly condemn the increase of violence which has again reached the same levels as before the recent reaffirmation of the ceasefire, including in the vicinity of the Zolote disengagement zone. We commend the SMM’s continuous efforts to help maintain or re-establish the essential civilian infrastructure such as water, gas, electricity and heating.

These worrying developments come against the backdrop of a profound lack of political will to address the root causes of the conflict. In this context we welcome that the Chairman in Office, Minister Lajčák, travelled to Ukraine last week and expressed that the conflict is the top priority in his agenda.

We regret that particularly Russia-backed armed formations continue to prevent the SMM from monitoring and reporting on the conflict in accordance with its mandate. The sides deny the SMM full access to all three pilot disengagement areas while Russia-backed armed formations systematically deny the SMM access to certain parts of the Ukraine-Russia state border. Of additional concern is that the SMM twice on 14 January heard a burst of heavy-machine-gun fire less than 200m from its position in a government controlled area close to the Line of Contact. Equally alarming is the fact that the SMM reports about new places in the conflict area with mine hazard signs. We strongly urge the sides to respect the SMM mandate to which they themselves have signed up to and allow for safe, secure and unimpeded access for the SMM to all of Ukraine

including along the Ukraine-Russia state border and the Crimean peninsula. This includes the SMM's UAVs. We are therefore deeply concerned that on 16, 17 and 18 January an SMM LR UAV was jammed while flying close to the Line of Contact while a mini-UAV was targeted with small arms fire on 12 and 14 January when flying across the Line of Contact. One of the UAVs was subsequently lost. At the same time, we are yet to receive a substantial explanation from the Russian Federation regarding the downing of the SMM LR UAV on 27 October last year. Let me reiterate that the EU strongly condemns this persistent targeting of the SMM UAVs by the sides in clear violation of the SMM mandate. Targeting of UAVs puts the lives of our monitors at risk and can also cause significant financial loss to the mission. It must stop immediately. 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.

The EU reiterates its utmost concern regarding the escalation that took place in the Kerch Strait and the Azov Sea and Russia's violation of international law. We remain dismayed over the unacceptable use of force by Russia on 25 November against Ukrainian ships and their crews. The risk of escalation in the area remains high, affecting the security situation in the entire Black Sea region. We strongly reiterate our call on Russia to release unconditionally and without delay the vessels and crew, whose illegal arrest has been extended to late April. The European Union expects Russia to ensure unhindered, safe and free passage through the Kerch Strait to and from the Azov Sea, in accordance with international law. We further call on Russia to use its considerable influence over the armed formations, to allow the SMM to monitor the coastal line east of Mariupol, which Russia backed armed formations have prevented for over a year.

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. In this context we reiterate our condemnation of the so-called “elections” that took place on 11 November 2018 in the non-government controlled territories. We do not and will not recognise them. 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 remains 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*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, the EFTA countries ICELAND, NORWAY and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, 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.