

STATEMENT IN REPLY TO THE BRIEFINGS GIVEN BY
AMBASSADORS SAJDIK AND APAKAN

Delivered by Ambassador Steffen Kongstad at the Permanent Council
Vienna, 29 November 2018

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Mr. Chair,

I would also like to thank Ambassadors Apakan and Sajdik for their reports to the Permanent Council, and to reiterate Norway's appreciation for their important work.

Norway notes with regret that we can still not talk of any meaningful implementation of the ceasefire agreement. Rather the security situation in Eastern Ukraine has continued to deteriorate. More ceasefire violations are observed. New mines are laid. Heavy weapons that should have been withdrawn are still there. Civilians still die. Norway yet again recalls the obligations under the Mine Ban Convention, The amended Protocol II of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and other instruments of International Humanitarian Law. The parties all have a responsibility to protect the civilian population from the dangers that arise from military operations.

The monitors face increased impediments, restrictions, threats and intimidation, predominantly in non-government controlled areas. This hampers their work and goes against their freedom of movement. A long range UAV was lost, likely shot down, after it observed a surface-to-air missile system near the border with Russia. Continued jamming of the UAVs reduces the monitors' ability to provide factual information. We recall that the SMM's mandate covers all Ukrainian territory, including the Crimean peninsula. All parties to the conflict should contribute to the SMM being able to fulfil its mandate. Also, the safety of the monitors and their equipment must be protected.

Mr. Chair,

The incident south of the Kerch strait on Sunday 25 November constitutes a further serious escalation of the tension between Ukraine and the Russian Federation. Russia's use of force was disproportionate and unacceptable. We urge Russia to release the vessels and their crews. We also call on Russia to honour its obligations under International Law, including the Law of the Sea, and under international agreements to which it is party.

Following its illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol, the Russian Federation has pursued a policy of gradually imposing unilateral control over the Kerch Strait and the Sea of Azov, leading up to the incident on 25 November. Through this deliberate policy, Russia has created this latest escalation. It can therefore also choose to de-escalate tension by reversing its policy, and we urge it to do so. Due to the gravity of the current situation, we nevertheless call on both sides to show restraint and do their utmost to reduce tension.

Norway reiterates its strong support of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, including the Crimean Peninsula and the adjoining territorial waters.

Mr. Chair,

This incident at sea reminds us that the conflict in and around Ukraine is still a clear and present danger to security in the OSCE area. That is why we consider the work of ambassadors Sajdik and Apakan to monitor the conflict and facilitate the diplomatic process to be so important. The OSCE has no more important task than to work towards a lasting, peaceful settlement of this conflict and of the other unresolved conflicts in our region.

In conclusion, I wish to repeat Norway's strong support for the work Ambassadors Sajdik and Apakan and their teams, continue to do under very demanding circumstances.

Thank you