



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council N° 1210
Vienna, 20 December 2018**

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

1. Mr. Chairperson, we are profoundly concerned that the security situation is deteriorating with ceasefire violations on the rise and a significant increase in the use of Minsk-proscribed weapons. Between 3-9 December the SMM recorded 70 percent more ceasefire violations compared to the week before while the use of weapons that should have been withdrawn according to the Minsk agreements increased 17 times compared with the previous week. On no less than 307 occasions were these weapons used. Adding to the concern is the continued deterioration of the security and humanitarian situation in and around the disengagement areas where positions are moving even closer , in particular between Zolote 4 and 5 where positions are in a distance of less than 300m, very close to civilian houses which has led to eight civilian casualties in only a few weeks. We stress that a recommitment by the sides to a ceasefire on the occasion of Christmas is urgent and call on them to do everything possible to make it comprehensive and sustainable, in accordance with the letter and spirit of the Minsk agreements. We equally urge the sides to agree to a prisoner exchange by the end of the year.
2. We reiterate our dismay over the unacceptable use of force by Russia on 25 November, which happened against the backdrop of increasing militarization in the area of the Azov Sea and the Kerch Strait. It also affects the security situation in the entire Black Sea region. We call on all for utmost restraint to de-escalate the situation immediately and to restore security. We strongly call on Russia to release the captured vessels, their crew and equipment unconditionally and without delay. The European Union further expects

Russia to ensure unhindered and free passage through the Kerch Strait to and from the Azov Sea, in accordance with international law.

3. The impact of the Russian actions are already being felt on mainland Ukraine as reported by the SMM. About 30 vessels sailing to and from Mariupol have been prevented from passing through the Kerch Strait between 25 November and 1 December leading to financial costs for shipping companies. The cargo volume of Mariupol port has decreased to about 450,000 tons per month, compared with 700,000 before April 2018, causing economic difficulties to the region. In addition there are concerns that due to recent developments no foreign company will be willing to conduct dredging at the port, which is necessary for keeping the depth of 8m. No Ukrainian companies can conduct this. Should the issue remain unaddressed approximately 90 percent of cargo ships using the port would not be fully loaded, which could cause further economic losses. We encourage the SMM to continue to monitor the effects of the impediments put on ships passing through the Kerch Strait. We will remain attentive to ideas by the SMM and the CPC on the OSCE's role, within the existing mandate of the SMM, in connection with the situation in and around the Kerch Strait and the Azov Sea. Also in this context we strongly condemn impediments to the free, unlimited, safe and secure access of the SMM and reiterate that the SMM mandate allows for safe and secure access throughout Ukraine including the Crimean Peninsula and along the Ukraine-Russia state border.

4. Regrettably, the mission continued to face restrictions of its freedom of movement and other impediments to the implementation of its Mandate. Mines and unexploded ordnance remain a threat to the observers. In addition, between 3-9 December the SMM's freedom of movement was restricted on 11 occasions, all but one in areas held by Russia-backed armed formations. We strongly condemn the targeting of SMM assets in particular the shooting at SMM UAVs in an area held by Russia-backed armed formations on the 11, 13 and 16 December as well as near government-controlled Bila-Hora on 8 December. We reiterate our call for a substantial explanation from the Russian Federation regarding the downing of the SMM LR UAV on 27 October close to the Ukraine-Russia border and

underline that the operational, security and financial consequences of all obstructions must be assessed. Those responsible for any willful damage, destruction or loss of SMM UAVs and other assets should be held accountable, both politically and financially.

5. The EU remains firm in its call on all sides to swiftly and fully implement the Minsk agreements and honor 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 recognise them. We again call on Russia to immediately stop fueling 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.

6. 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 EFTA countries ICELAND, NORWAY and LIECHTENSTEIN, 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.