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EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation N°912
Vienna, 3 April 2019**

EU Statement on the Security Situation in and around Ukraine

The EU and its Member States are deeply concerned about the deteriorating security situation in the conflict zone. The increased violence has serious negative repercussions on the lives of civilians living in the vicinity of the contact line, suffering from the conflict and damage to residential houses and critical infrastructure. The lack of progress on disengagement and the deteriorating security situation in and around the disengagement areas, as well as the presence of mines and unexploded ordnance along the contact line further add to our concerns. Despite the obligation to remove all previously laid mines pursuant to Article 6 of the Memorandum of 19 September 2015 and the Trilateral Contact Group's Decision on Mine Action of 3 March 2016, the SMM continued to observe the presence of anti-tank mines, including mines newly laid and close to populated areas. We once again reiterate our call on the 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 strongly condemn the ongoing systematic restrictions to the SMM's work and attempts to impede the fulfilment of its mandate. Over the past week (18-24 March) the SMM was restricted in its freedom of movement on 20 occasions, all but one occurred in areas controlled by Russia-backed armed formations. Furthermore, due to restrictions of its freedom of movement at border crossing points near the Russian Federation, the SMM was only able to conduct limited monitoring there. We repeat that the SMM and its technical assets must have full, safe and unhindered access throughout Ukraine. This includes the areas along the Ukraine-Russia state border

and the Crimean peninsula. While we are yet to receive a credible explanation by the delegation of the Russian Federation regarding the presence of highly sophisticated Russian jamming system (R-330Zh, Zhitel) and a radio-electronic jamming complex (Tirada-2) in eastern Ukraine in areas controlled by Russia-backed armed formations as observed by the SMM, we remain concerned about the continued jamming of the SMM's UAVs. We condemn any targeting of the SMM's technical assets, such as the machine-gun fire in direction of an SMM long-range UAV on 20 March in an area controlled by Russia-backed armed formations.

Our position on the unjustified use of force by Russia at the Kerch Strait on 25 November 2018 and its negative impact in the Azov Sea and Russia's violations of international law is well known. We strongly call on Russia to release the crew members and return their vessels unconditionally and without delay. We expect Russia to ensure unhindered and free passage through the Kerch Strait to and from the Azov Sea, in accordance with international law. The increasing militarisation of Crimea continues to impact negatively the security situation in the Black Sea region.

Mr. Chairman, we are concerned that in violation of international humanitarian law, Russian citizenship and conscription in the armed forces of the Russian Federation have been imposed on Crimean residents.

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 REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, 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 Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.