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EU statement in Response to Briefings by the Special Representative in Ukraine of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office and in the Trilateral Contact Group, Ambassador Martin Sajdik and the Chief Monitor of the OSCE SMM, Ambassador Ertugrul Apakan

Mr. Chairperson, the European Union welcomes Ambassadors Sajdik and Apakan to the Permanent Council and commends them for their perseverance, dedication and tireless efforts in working towards sustainable peace in Ukraine.

Ambassador Sajdik, we welcome the most recent commitments to ceasefire and subsequent initial reductions in violence that you and your team managed to secure. The EU fully supports the efforts of the TCG and its working groups and we regret that the situation, especially at the Line of Contact, remains extremely volatile despite your undertakings. We echo your appeal that withdrawal of heavy weapons, disengagement and comprehensive demining are a prerequisite for a sustainable ceasefire. We urge all sides to boost their participation in the working groups of the Trilateral Contact Group and to improve engagement with OSCE coordinators.

We welcome that the number of civilian casualties has gone down lately. Nevertheless, the widespread presence of mines and UXOs, shelling in and near residential areas as well as fighting in the close vicinity of the few entry-exit checkpoints continue to put civilian lives at risk. During the latest reporting period at least five civilians were killed and 21 injured. At the same time the provision of basic services to civilians living close to the line of contact remains at risk due to lack of protection by the sides of critical civilian infrastructure. We commend the SMM for its crucial role in this regard, in facilitating and monitoring local ceasefires in order to enable maintenance and repair works to

these sites, as seen recently with the successful repair works on the South Donbas main water pipeline that provides 1.3 million people on both sides of the line of contact with fresh water. We remain deeply worried about potential ecological disasters caused by shelling or poor maintenance of critical infrastructure.

Ambassador Apakan, we strongly condemn the continued threats and restrictions to the SMM, which occur predominantly in areas held by Russia-backed armed formations. This hampers the SMM from fulfilling its mandate. The SMM must have safe, secure, unconditional and unimpeded access throughout Ukraine, including the Crimean peninsula and along the Ukraine-Russia state border. Of particular concern is the 13 August incident in Smile outside government control, where a member of the armed formations pointed a rifle at an SMM patrol. Such impediments are unacceptable. Of further concern is the systematic denial of access to certain border areas by Russia-backed armed formations. As a result and underlining the role of the SMM's technological equipment, the SMM has to rely mostly on long-range UAVs to monitor these areas. In this context we note that on the night of 7-8 August an SMM long-range UAV observed convoys of trucks entering Ukraine from the Russian Federation outside an official border crossing facility and without the consent of Ukrainian authorities. During the night of 4 September an SMM long-range UAV recorded another such convoy crossing the border into the Russian Federation. These incidents give rise to serious concerns regarding the nature of the cargo transported and underline the need for a proper monitoring of the uncontrolled Ukrainian-Russian state border by the SMM as well as a substantial expansion of the OSCE Border Observation Mission.

Ambassador Sajdik, we commend you and the Coordinators of the working groups for the tireless efforts within the TCG towards the Minsk Agreements implementation. In this context, we are deeply concerned about the announcement that so-called "elections" will be held in the so-called "Luhansk People's Republic" and "Donetsk People's Republic" on 11 November 2018. This runs contrary to the spirit and letter of the Minsk agreements, which have specific provisions regarding the organisation of local elections in those areas, as part of the overall political settlement. These elections should be organized in accordance with Ukrainian legislation, OSCE standards and monitored by

ODIHR. We call on the Russian Federation to make full use of its influence to stop preparations for these illegitimate elections.

Ambassador Sajdik, we highly appreciate your efforts in working towards sustainable peace in Ukraine. While we understand the disappointment of Ukrainian legislators and society in the context of continued violence in eastern Ukraine and the lack of progress by the Russian Federation, we recall the commitments under the Minsk agreements by Ukraine. In this context we emphasize the need by Ukraine to ensure the extension by the parliament of the validity of the special status law beyond its expiry date.

Ambassadors Apakan and Sajdik, the EU remains deeply concerned about the continued imprisonment of Ukrainian film director Oleg Sentsov and of Volodymyr Balukh who have both been on hunger strike for several months, as well as Ukrainian journalist Roman Sushchenko, and other illegally detained Ukrainian citizens by the Russian Federation and we call for their immediate and unconditional release. In this regard, we welcome the statement made by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the media, Harlem Desir on September 12th after the decision of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation to uphold the sentencing of the Ukrainian journalist Roman Sushchenko. In addition, the recent announcement by Moscow that its security services are taking part in criminal investigations in one of the so-called “people’s republics” adds to our concerns.

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 in line with OSCE principles and commitments. Respect for these must be restored. We reaffirm our full support to the endeavours in the Normandy Format aimed at sustainable and peaceful resolution of this conflict. 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. We again call on Russia to immediately stop 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.

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 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. 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*, and the EFTA countries ICELAND 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.