



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No 1117 Vienna, 3 November 2016

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

The European Union is deeply concerned by the volatile situation along the line of contact in Eastern Ukraine, with intense fighting in hot spots and the repeated use of heavy weapons. Civilians in harm’s way, unable or unwilling to leave, continue to pay a heavy toll, with further casualties and damage to infrastructure recorded by the SMM last week. This humanitarian suffering is entirely avoidable and must stop. It requires that the sides take immediate steps to fully adhere to the ceasefire, verifiably disengage and withdraw Minsk-proscribed heavy weapons and ensure full and safe humanitarian access. These are necessary steps in order to ensure a sustainable political solution in line with OSCE principles and commitments.

The SMM’s monitors and their remote monitoring equipment continue to face significant obstacles, including in the disengagement areas. UAVs employed by the SMM have repeatedly come under fire and several long-range UAVs have been downed near the contact line, in particular over areas held by Russian-backed separatists. For more than two months, the SMM has been without functioning long-range UAVs. This significantly undermines the SMM’s monitoring, particularly in areas not controlled by the Ukrainian government. Moreover, SMM monitors are regularly threatened and subjected to close or direct fire. As reported by the SMM, on 27 October, a bullet struck an SMM vehicle; a few days prior, two heavy machinegun bullets passed some two meters from an SMM patrol. This is unacceptable and those responsible must be held accountable. We reiterate our firm position that the SMM must have full, safe and unhindered access throughout Ukraine, including along the Ukrainian-Russian State border. The SMM must be allowed to set up planned Forward Patrol Bases in Amvrosivka and Antratsit as they have repeatedly asked for. This would be a necessary step towards giving the SMM better conditions for observation in border areas.

We again call on the sides in the Trilateral Contact Group and its working groups to agree on steps toward the full implementation of the Minsk agreements. This includes the modalities of holding local elections in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in accordance with Ukrainian legislation, OSCE standards and monitored by ODIHR. We reiterate our firm position that established conditions for ODIHR monitoring, including ensuring security and access, must be met. We also reiterate our call on the sides to agree on the exchange of prisoners and detainees.

We remain firm in our call on all sides to swiftly and fully implement the Minsk agreements and honour their commitments in full. We underline Russia's responsibility in this regard and yet again call on Russia to use its considerable influence over the separatists it backs to meet those commitments in full. Moreover, we again call on Russia to immediately stop providing financial and military support to the separatists. The ceasefire must be respected. All Minsk-regulated weapons must be withdrawn and foreign armed formations, military equipment and mercenaries removed from Ukraine. Re-establishing full Ukrainian control over its state border is essential. We reiterate our deep concern about information on the presence of Russian military equipment and personnel in separatist-held areas. The duration of the European Union's economic sanctions against Russia is linked to the complete implementation of the Minsk agreements.

Mr. Chair, we also express our concern for the treatment of Oleg Sentsov and Oleksandr Kolchenko, serving twenty and ten years in prison, respectively, for protesting Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea. Both were illegally detained in Ukraine, moved to Russia and are currently being refused transfer back to Ukraine by Russian authorities on the grounds that they are now considered to be Russian citizens by the Russian authorities. We underline Russia's obligation to respect their rights and call on Russia to respect its international commitments, including those within the OSCE, and release without further delay all illegally held Ukrainian citizens, both in Russia and on the illegally annexed Ukrainian peninsula. We will continue to follow these cases closely.

The EU expresses its continued concern regarding the humanitarian impact of the on-going crisis in parts of eastern Ukraine. We deeply regret that so-called "humanitarian convoys" from Russia continue to enter Ukrainian territory, the fifty-fifth

of its kind passing through on 27 October. This occurs without the consent of the Ukrainian authorities and in clear violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and without fundamental international humanitarian principles being observed. The Minsk package foresees that humanitarian aid will be delivered through an international mechanism. An agreement on this in the humanitarian working group remains crucial.

The EU recalls its unwavering support to the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence of Ukraine, 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 stabilise the situation and reverse moves that contravene these principles. We reiterate our strong condemnation of the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol to the Russian Federation and we will not recognise it.

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, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.