



EUROPEAN UNION

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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

The European Union welcomes Ambassador Sajdik and Ambassador Apakan back to the Permanent Council and thanks them for their briefings and for their important work. We appreciate the Chief Monitor's report on the work of the SMM and take this opportunity to reaffirm our strong support to the Mission. We underline the importance we attach to a timely extension of the SMM mandate and that the mission is provided with the necessary resources. We also stress the need for the timely prolongation of the mandate of the OSCE Observer Mission at the Russian checkpoints Gukovo and Donetsk.

As too often has been the case, your briefing takes place at a time when the situation along the line of contact remains tense and fragile. Despite a brief decrease in violence in the two weeks following the sides' renewed commitment to the ceasefire as of 24 December, ceasefire violations have remained a daily occurrence and have significantly increased again in the beginning of this year. Minsk-proscribed heavy weapons continue to be used, placing civilians at great risk and severely damaging civilian infrastructure. According to UNOCHA's 2017 Humanitarian Needs Overview for Ukraine, almost 10,000 people have been killed since the fighting began, including 2,000 civilians. In 2016 alone, more than 1,000 inhabited houses are estimated to have been damaged by fighting. 3.8 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance; about 1 million of these are children. Furthermore, the human rights situation remains grim in areas held by Russian-backed separatists.

It is against this bleak backdrop that we again urge the sides to respect the ceasefire, fully and verifiably withdraw all Minsk-proscribed weapons, disengage, remove

obstacles to humanitarian organisations and ensure full, safe and unhindered SMM access throughout Ukraine, including along the Ukrainian-Russian State border. These are important steps toward a sustainable political solution in line with OSCE principles and commitments. Respect for these fundamental principles and commitments must be restored.

We again join the Chief Monitor in condemning the significant obstacles and regular intimidation which continue to prevent the SMM from fully discharging its mandate. The SMM must not be prevented from setting up planned Forward Patrol Bases in i. a. Amvrosivka and Antratsit, as a necessary step towards giving the SMM better conditions for monitoring along the Ukrainian-Russian State border. The current patchy and conditional SMM access to the border area is unacceptable.

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 call on the sides to fully withdraw from the previously agreed disengagement areas and to agree on additional disengagement areas opening of crossing points over the line of contact. While we welcome the release of hostages towards the end of 2016, we urge the sides to build on this by releasing all hostages and illegally detained persons. We also urge the humanitarian working group to find a solution to removing all remaining obstacles to humanitarian actors in separatist-held areas.

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 in order to achieve a sustainable political solution in line with

OSCE principles and commitments. 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, on 19 December 2016 the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution on the human rights situation in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. Reaffirming the General Assembly's non-recognition of the annexation of the Ukrainian peninsula, the resolution condemned "the abuse and discrimination of the residents of Crimea, including Crimean Tartars, by the Russian occupation authorities." We strongly support the resolution's call on the Russian Federation to ensure the proper and unimpeded access of international human rights monitoring missions and human rights NGOs to Crimea. Just this week, concern was voiced over the detention centre in Simferopol, where conditions for political prisoners held there were described as inhumane. Without independent international humanitarian access, it is difficult to investigate such serious allegations. We welcome the recent joint visit by the Ukrainian and Russian ombudsmen to the peninsula, however this is far from sufficient.

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 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, LIECHTENSTEIN 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.