



EUROPEAN UNION

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**OSCE Permanent Council No 1165
Vienna, 23 November 2017**

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

Mr. Chairperson, we are concerned that the number of ceasefire violations continues to rise despite the statement by the sides in last week’s TCG on their re-commitment to the cease fire of end of August. We urge all sides to translate their words into actions on the ground and ensure real implementation of a comprehensive and permanent ceasefire. In line herewith, we call on all sides to disengage their forces, withdraw heavy weapons to verifiable storage areas.

The EU follows closely the worrying situation in Luhansk where the SMM observed a significant presence of military-type vehicles and armed men in military-type clothing in the inner part in Luhansk city. In addition the mission reported about a military-type convoy moving from Debaltseve eastwards in the direction of Luhansk city. We note reports about large-scale military equipment entering the city in the course of the last 48 hours. The EU takes note of the SMM’s decision to curtail patrolling activities in the light of these developments and calls on the mission to keep security measures under constant review. We urge Russia to exercise its influence over the separatists it backs to assure the safety of the SMM and its monitors and we would welcome hearing from the Secretary General and the participating States most closely involved their urgent assessment of the situation.

The SMM continues to prove how invaluable their work on the ground is and we reiterate our full support to the mission and their work, which continues to take place in a challenging context. Just last week they provided mirror patrols to monitor adherence to localized ceasefires to allow for over 30 vital infrastructure restoration works and demining activities. This included the phenol sludge reservoir in Novhorodske, where a collapse would endanger the water supply of

the entire Donetsk region. Repairs like these are crucial for the population in eastern Ukraine to have continued access to basic services such as water, electricity, gas and heating, necessary to maintain a certain degree of normality in their lives in the face of the ongoing conflict.

We are concerned that the freedom of movement for the SMM continues to be restricted primarily in areas not under the control of the Ukrainian government. In particular, we are concerned by continued restrictions to SMM's access to permanent storage sites of heavy weapons on both sides of the contact line. Citing orders from their superiors, Russian-backed separatists continued to deny the SMM access to Siedove – near the uncontrolled segment of the border with the Russian Federation – which the Mission has been unable to visit since April 2017. We remind all participating states once again that the mandate of the SMM allows for safe, secure and unimpeded access throughout Ukraine, including along the Ukrainian-Russian border and in illegally-annexed Crimea and Sevastopol. International monitoring, as well as reinstated Ukrainian control of their international border is essential.

We are equally alarmed to learn that the SMM is being surveilled against their own will. Last week the SMM found, in the briefing room of its forward patrol base in separatist-held Debaltseve, a concealed video and audio recording equipment. This is unacceptable and constitutes yet another example of impediments to or harassment of the SMM and their work. The SMM must have a safe and conducive environment to fulfil its mandate.

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 in line with OSCE principles and commitments. Respect for these fundamental principles must be restored. We call on Russia to fully assume its responsibility and to use its considerable influence over the separatists it backs to meet the Minsk commitments in full. We urge Russia to immediately stop providing financial and military support to the separatists, and we remain deeply concerned 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.

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 the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol to the Russian Federation and we will not recognise it. 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 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 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.