



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Permanent Council No 1112 Vienna, 8 September 2016

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

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The European Union welcomes the substantial decrease in violence along the line of contact since the sides recommitted to the ceasefire on 1 September and hopes that it will lead to a sustainable ceasefire. However, the situation continues to be fragile. The substantial decrease in violence comes after weeks of intense fighting, rising civilian casualties and a disconcerting concentration of heavy weapons near the line of contact. This underlines that mutual trust remains low and the situation fragile. We therefore urge the sides to consolidate the recent progress by ensuring full, swift and verifiable disengagement, strictly adhering to the ceasefire and verifiably withdrawing all Minsk-regulated weapons. This is necessary in order to ensure a sustainable political solution in line with OSCE principles and commitments.

The SMM can play a central role in facilitating disengagement and consolidating the ceasefire. This requires that the SMM is afforded full, safe and unhindered access throughout Ukraine, including along the Ukrainian-Russian State border. Regrettably, significant obstacles remain, particularly in separatist-held areas. About 80% of the SMM’s access restrictions since January have occurred in areas held by Russia backed separatists. The SMM has had limited access to potential disengagement areas and the SMM’s access to the border not under the Ukrainian government’s control remains limited and tightly controlled. Moreover, the past weeks have seen further serious incidents, mostly in separatist-held areas, including the intimidation of monitors and close fire forcing the SMM to temporarily evacuate a Forward Patrol Base. We also deplore that an SMM vehicle was set on fire recently in Ivano-Frankivsk. These incidents continue to occur with impunity, despite assurances to the contrary. This is unacceptable. It undermines the Mission and inhibits Minsk implementation. In short, as made abundantly clear by Principal Deputy Chief Monitor Hug at Monday’s briefing, no SMM access means no verification, no mutual

trust, no disengagement and no improvement in the humanitarian situation along the contact line. We therefore urge Russia and Ukraine to ensure that the JCCC conducts an effective investigation into cases of intimidation and obstruction of the SMM, and engages in an adequate and systematic rapid response, when called upon by the SMM.

We urge the sides to ensure that the decline in violence paves the way for much needed humanitarian relief to the local population. Humanitarian actors must have full, safe and unhindered access to separatist-held areas. Military formations in civilian residential areas and near schools, as documented by the SMM, should be withdrawn. We urge the sides to undertake mine action in line with their commitments and to ensure the security conditions needed to enable the opening of further civilian crossing points.

Mr. Chair, 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 agreeing on 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 further exchanges 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.

While noting the release from the forced psychiatric confinement and examination of the Deputy Chairman of the Mejlis, Ilmi Umerov, we stress that such practices represent a clear violation of international human rights standards. We again call for all charges against him to be dropped and travel restrictions to be lifted. The European Union has repeatedly condemned the deterioration of the human rights situation in Crimea and Sevastopol since the illegal annexation by the Russian Federation.

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 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.