



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council N° 1170
Vienna, 21 December 2017**

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

Mr. Chairperson, let me begin by reiterating the EU’s call on all sides to show restraint, disengage, respect the ceasefire and withdraw heavy weapons. We are deeply concerned by the sharp deterioration of the security situation in conflict-affected eastern Ukraine where we regrettably are no closer to ending the violence. Ceasefire violations continue to increase and are now at their highest since February 2017. In addition the use of Minsk-proscribed weapons has doubled and we are seeing up to 1500 explosions and up to 6000 ceasefire violations a day. This sharp deterioration is once again increasing suffering for civilians – we are concerned by reports of civilian casualties following shelling of Novoluhanske village, as well as ongoing shelling around key civilian infrastructure. These attacks on infrastructure not only threaten the provision of vital services but have also led to civilian workers becoming trapped and in need of evacuation.

We welcome the reaffirmation of commitment to a comprehensive, sustainable and unlimited ceasefire as agreed at yesterday’s meeting in the Trilateral Contact Group, and call upon the sides to fully implement it.

We remain concerned that despite SMM’s repeated calls on the sides to ensure its safe and secure access throughout the country, the monitors repeatedly face significant threats and access restrictions particularly in Russian backed separatist-held areas. The latest SMM Weekly report documents endangerment of and restrictions upon SMM personnel and their activities. This includes the firing and explosions around the forward patrol base at Popasna, the forced abduction and detention of monitors in Donetsk city by so-called "DPR" members, and being

told by Russia-backed separatists to leave the Horlivka area for asking questions of the local population. We note once again that the SMM reports ongoing, pervasive restrictions upon its freedom of movement in non-government controlled areas of Donetsk. We condemn in the strongest terms these actions and call upon those responsible to be held accountable and remind all participating states that the SMM must have full, safe and unhindered access throughout Ukraine, including along the Ukrainian-Russian border.

We are deeply concerned about the withdrawal by the Russian Federation of its contingent to the Joint Centre for Control and Coordination. This decision risks making more difficult the implementation of the Minsk process, in which the JCCC has a specified role under the Addendum to the Package of Measures as well as the TCG decision on mine action. The JCCC is an important mechanism which is tasked to facilitate key actions in reducing tensions, notably local ceasefires, withdrawal and permanent storage of heavy weapons and mine clearance as well as repairing critical civilian infrastructure. The necessity for such a mechanism with a possibility to de-escalate the situation was illustrated on Tuesday with the intensified shelling of the Donetsk water filtration station and a lift pumping station near Pervomaisk, potentially affecting thousands of civilians. The JCCC is also an important factor in ensuring the safety and security of the SMM Monitors and, consequently, the fulfilment of their mandate in an extremely dangerous environment. We call on Russia and Ukraine to re-establish the functionality of the JCCC and to strengthen cooperation within its framework in order for it to effectively implement its given tasks and ensure accountability of the sides for threats and impediments against the SMM. We call on the Russian Federation to return to the JCCC as soon as possible.

Last week we expressed our satisfaction over repair work done to the wooden ramp at Stanytsia Luhanska bridge. However, we also warned that more efforts were needed. The sides are yet to open those additional entry-exit checkpoints which would ease the lives of thousands of civilians at a time where winter has manifested itself. We call on all sides to put people first, to fully implement Minsk agreements and to bring peace to Ukraine. 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. Restoring respect for these principles is crucial. 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 again call on 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.

We encourage the sides to proceed with the exchange of detainees before New Year's Eve, as earlier agreed.

The EU recalls its unwavering support to the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence of Ukraine within its internationally recognized 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 country NORWAY, member of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, 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.