



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council No 1138
Vienna, 23 March 2017**

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

The security situation along the line of contact remains highly volatile, exacerbating the serious humanitarian situation. Fierce fighting in hotspots continues and has increased in disengagement areas. We therefore again call on all sides to take immediate steps to ensure full respect of the ceasefire, the withdrawal of all Minsk-proscribed weapons, complete disengagement, and comprehensive, safe and unhindered SMM access, including along the Ukrainian-Russian border. Full humanitarian access to areas held by Russia-backed separatists, in line with international humanitarian principles, must also be ensured. These are important steps toward a sustainable political solution in line with OSCE principles and commitments. Respect for these fundamental principles must be restored.

As participating States of the OSCE, we have mandated the SMM to establish and report on facts on the ground. The SMM should be allowed to fulfil its mandated tasks without access restrictions, intimidation and with full baseline information from the sides, in order to be able to facilitate significant progress on the ground. The SMM should be able to significantly expand and increase its monitoring of ceasefire compliance, building trust and deterring destabilisation. The SMM must be able to verify - not just monitor - the withdrawal of heavy weapons, a cornerstone in any sustainable ceasefire. The SMM must be able to move freely and report on developments throughout the conflict area, including along the border, facilitating humanitarian support, repair of infrastructure, and shedding light on the human rights consequences of the conflict.

Regrettably, the SMM's work and ability to implement its mandate remains hampered by significant restrictions. The SMM continues to be targeted by intimidation, as seen on 17 March, when an SMM patrol drew close fire. It is unacceptable that unarmed

civilian OSCE monitors are subjected to this type of intimidation and aggression. The safety of the monitors is a priority and we urge the parties to exercise restraint. Also, we condemn the systematic disinformation campaign that continues to target the Mission in separatist-held areas: we see a concrete risk of endangering the monitors by encouraging hostility towards them. Such consistent and deliberate undermining of the SMM, and the impunity with which it is carried out, is unacceptable and those responsible must be held to account. We yet again call on all sides to fulfil their commitment to provide the SMM full and updated baseline information. Such information is a prerequisite if the SMM is to be able to verify – not just observe – the withdrawal of heavy weapons.

We continue to be concerned by all administrative and economic measures recently adopted that could foster divisions and lead to further alienation. This is not in line with the spirit of the Minsk agreements.

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 local elections in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in full 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 first be met.

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. 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.

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 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 ICELAND, 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, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.