



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Permanent Council No 1150 Vienna, 22 June 2017

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

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It is with deep regret and the utmost condemnation that the European Union once again notes the unacceptable intimidation and restrictions of the SMM that continue to take place, primarily in areas held by Russia-backed separatists. The intimidation shows no sign of easing; in fact, the number of cases of serious intimidation of the SMM has doubled in 2017 compared to the same period in 2016; a serious incident involving the SMM has taken place every third day. In one particularly grave incident on 20 June, two armed separatists approached an SMM patrol with their faces covered and aggressively threatened the SMM patrol members. One of the armed separatists attempted to gain access to an OSCE patrol vehicle by hitting a window with a gunstock, and holding the driver and passenger at gunpoint. When the vehicle drove away this same man fired three shots at the vehicle. The gravity and frequency of these incidents increasingly calls into question the intent of the Russian-backed separatists who perpetrate them. It is high time that those responsible are brought to justice, especially considering that many of the incidents are filmed by the separatists and the perpetrators would therefore be relatively easy to identify.

The EU once again strongly condemns these consistent attempts to undermine the SMM and recalls that the SMM must have full, safe and unhindered access throughout Ukraine, including to the Ukraine-Russia state border. We urge Russia to exercise its influence over the separatists it backs to put an end to the restrictions and intimidation and to ensure accountability. The assurance we received from the Russian delegation on 8 June that the

separatists are taking steps to ensure the safety of monitors is contradicted by the reality which those monitors continue to face on the ground. We call on the sides to ensure a safe and conducive environment for the SMM to fulfil its mandate. Without proper and unimpeded monitoring by the SMM, there cannot be a credible and verified improvement of the security situation, which is the basis for further progress on the political track of the peace process. We reiterate our full support to the SMM, its mandate and especially to its brave and dedicated monitors.

At the same time, the volatile and unpredictable security situation in eastern Ukraine remains of serious concern to the European Union. Once again, we gather in the Permanent Council this week against the backdrop of increased ceasefire violations and further civilian casualties. Despite the SMM's monitoring restrictions, in the period of 5-11 June, the Mission recorded a 75% increase in ceasefire violations compared to the previous week, including in Donetsk city which is densely populated. In the same period, the SMM recorded over 1,200 instances of use of heavy weapons. The human cost of the continued fighting is all too clear: since the beginning of the conflict, more than 10,000 people have died, and the conflict has taken at least 48 lives and injured 222 civilians this year alone. In fact, the number of reported civilian casualties has increased doubled in 2017 compared to the same period in 2016. We 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 to ensure comprehensive mine action. These are important steps towards a sustainable political solution in line with OSCE principles and commitments. Respect for these fundamental principles must be restored, and the European Union will continue to hold the sides accountable, assessing their compliance by their deeds, not by their words.

This week's conference organized by the Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media on media freedom in volatile environments highlighted several critical issues surrounding safety of journalists, propaganda and fake news, relevant to the ongoing conflict. In this context, we express our concern regarding journalist and blogger Stanyslav Aseyev, a freelance contributor to Radio Free Europe, who has been missing since June 2 in an area held by

Russia-backed separatists. We call on all parties to provide information on his whereabouts and we welcome that the journalists taking part in the Russian-Ukrainian dialogue facilitated by the office of the RFoM have made a joint statement on his case. We are also following closely the court hearing of journalist Mykoloa Semena, which is dragging on interminably, and call for full, free and unhindered access of human rights monitors to the Crimean peninsula.

We regret that so-called “humanitarian convoys” from Russia continue to enter Ukrainian territory, the sixty-fourth of its kind passing through on 15 June. This occurs without the consent of the Ukrainian authorities and in clear violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, and without fundamental international humanitarian principles being observed. The Minsk package foresees that humanitarian aid will be delivered through an international mechanism. An agreement on this in the humanitarian working group remains crucial.

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. Accordingly, on 19 June, the European Council extended the EU's restrictive measures in response to the illegal annexation to 23 June 2018.

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 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.