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**OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation N°877
Vienna, 21 February 2018**

EU Statement on the Security situation in and around Ukraine

Mr. Chairperson, the European Union and its Member States are deeply concerned by the significant increase in ceasefire violations in eastern Ukraine, including a sharp increase in the use of Minsk-proscribed weapons. In the week of 5-11 February, the SMM recorded a tenfold increase, establishing that such weapons were fired in at least 1,000 instances, including MLRS rockets, artillery, mortar and tank rounds. On 7 February, the recorded use of such weapons was the highest number observed on a single day since March 2017. This trend is extremely worrying. Civilians are the ultimate victims of the increased violence as well as of mines and UXOs. We regret to read in the SMM reports about civilian casualties as well as damage to civilian infrastructure. On 7 February, the SMM reported about three children, aged 10, 14 and 3 years, who sustained shrapnel injuries as a result of UXO exploding. The SMM continues to report about firing weapons inside populated areas, as well as about presence of weapons and hardware in settlements and residential areas which put civilians at risk. We deplore shelling, the use of weapons and gunfire in residential areas.

We welcome that the TCG meeting of 14 February reiterated the commitment to the earlier decisions on a comprehensive, sustainable and unlimited ceasefire, as well as decisions on the withdrawal of forces and hardware, removal of heavy weapons, mine action and the prohibition of live-fire exercises near the line of contact. We call on all sides to strictly observe this commitment.

Mr. Chairperson, without proper and unimpeded monitoring by the SMM, there cannot be a verified improvement of the security situation, which is the basis for further progress on the political track. In this context, we are deeply concerned by ongoing restrictions and impediments to the SMM's freedom of movement, in particular targeting the SMM and its technical assets, primarily in areas held by Russian-backed separatists. On 9 February so-called "DPR" members fired warning shots in the vicinity of an SMM patrol. In addition, the

SMM observed small-arms fire targeting their UAVs on several occasions last week on both sides of the contact line. Last week (5-11 February) the SMM encountered restrictions ten times, all of which were in areas outside of government control. As in the past, at a checkpoint on road H15 east of non-government-controlled Kreminets, on three separate occasions so called "DPR" member only allowed the SMM to pass after checking its trailer. In addition, at this checkpoint they have conditioned the SMM's passage on ten occasions in this location since the beginning of 2018. Such behaviour is in breach of the SMM's mandate and its right to inviolability of assets. Also in contravention of its mandate, the SMM continues to experience denials of access to Siedove, a town outside government control near the border with the Russian Federation. Furthermore, separatists hinder the SMM in fulfilling its mandate while preventing it from establishing the facts and contact with the local population in non-government controlled areas: On four different occasions, school staff told the SMM that they could not speak with the SMM without written permission from so called "LPR" members. Also medical staff refused to speak with the SMM without permission from separatists. Such restrictions are unacceptable and do little to allay speculations about reasons behind these attempts to hide facts on the ground. We once again underline that the mandate of the SMM calls for full, safe and unhindered access throughout Ukraine including along the Ukrainian-Russian border.

Mr. Chairman, we are concerned about information that male civilians are being registered in non-government-controlled areas by the armed formations, as reported by the SMM, which could be an indication of preparation for conscription.

We reiterate our concerns over Russia's withdrawal from the JCCC. Due to this unilateral step, a number of important repair works have been stalled due to a lack of security guarantees in areas outside government control. Among those pending requests are security guarantees for maintenance of the sludge reservoir near the phenol factory in government-controlled Novhorodske, as reported by the SMM. We reiterate our call on the Russian Federation to return to the JCCC. We also call on Russia and Ukraine to re-establish the functionality of the JCCC and to strengthen cooperation within its framework.

We 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 once again call on Russia to use its considerable influence over the separatists it backs, to meet these commitments in full. We reiterate our deep concern regarding information about the presence of military equipment and personnel from Russia in the conflict zone. We 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. All foreign armed formations, military equipment and mercenaries must be removed from Ukraine. Re-establishing full Ukrainian control over its state border is essential.

We recall our unwavering support to the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders, and call upon Russia to do likewise. We urge Russia to recognize 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 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, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA, ANDORRA 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.