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**OSCE Permanent Council N° 1212
Vienna, 17 January 2019**

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

On 27 December in the Trilateral Contact Group, the sides reiterated their full commitment to a permanent ceasefire on the occasion of New Year and Christmas festivities, starting on 29 December 2018. We welcome that this step, which is in accordance with the letter and spirit of the Minsk agreements, has to some extent reduced the level of the use of force. However, we regret that it has not led to a complete halt in violence. On the contrary, several peaks of violence have also been observed over the course of the first half of January and since the recommitment there have been around 20 victims, killed or wounded. We continue to see worrying tendencies of Minsk violations including a lack of progress with regard to the three pilot disengagement areas. During the reporting period 17 December - 6 January the SMM registered hundreds of ceasefire violations, military hardware and the presence of Ukrainian Armed Forces and members of Russia-backed armed formations in and around all three disengagement areas. In this context, we strongly condemn the continued targeting of the Mission’s UAV’s, close to the contact line, the verbal and physical harassment and intimidation of SMM members by Russia-backed armed formations, the continued restrictions of the Mission’s access, including to all three disengagement areas and the presence of heavy weapons in violation of withdrawal lines on both sides of the contact line.

We equally condemn fighting near essential civilian infrastructure. This puts those working there as well as SMM monitors in great danger while also adding to the already difficult living conditions of civilians living along the contact line. On 10 January three Voda Donbassa water company workers were injured in an explosion while clearing snow from a road close to Kruta Balka, an area held by Russia-backed armed formations. We call on the sides to assure that civilian

infrastructure is spared and that those working tirelessly to provide civilians with essential services may continue their everyday routines in an unhindered manner and without risking their lives. We are very concerned about the worsening conditions for civilians in particular at the Entry-Exit-Checkpoints that have led recently to several casualties amongst elderly people. We urge the sides to start immediate action in order to reduce these hardships.

The EU reiterates its utmost concern regarding the escalation that took place in the Kerch Strait and the Azov Sea and Russia's violation of international law. We remain dismayed over the unacceptable use of force by Russia on 25 November against Ukrainian ships and their crews, which happened against the backdrop of Russia's ongoing militarization of Crimea, the Black and Azov Seas and the Kerch Strait. We call on all for utmost restraint to de-escalate the situation and to restore security. We strongly call on Russia to release unconditionally and without delay the captured vessels, equipment and crew who have had their pre-trial detention extended until the end of April this week by a Moscow court. The European Union further expects Russia to ensure unhindered and free passage through the Kerch Strait to and from the Azov Sea, in accordance with international law. We further reiterate our concern for the effects of the Russian actions in Ukraine where obstructions and delays are causing severe economic difficulties to the coastal cities in particular. Also in this context we strongly condemn impediments to the free, unhindered, safe and secure access of the SMM and reiterate that the SMM mandate allows for safe and secure access throughout Ukraine including the Crimean Peninsula and along the Ukraine-Russia state border. We deeply regret that the SMM has been prevented from accessing the coastal line east of Mariupol, in areas controlled by Russia backed armed formations for over a year.

We are yet to receive a substantial explanation from the Russian Federation regarding the downing of the SMM LR UAV on 27 October close to the Ukraine-Russia border and regret that the Russian Federation is unwilling to cooperate on this matter. We further underline that the operational, security and financial consequences of all obstructions must be assessed. Those responsible for any willful damage, destruction or loss of SMM UAVs and other assets should be held accountable, both politically and financially.

Pavlo Hryb, a disabled, 20-year old citizen of Ukraine was abducted on 24 August 2017 in Belarus, and detained by the Russian authorities without any clear charges. The European Union expects him to be immediately released and granted access to the special medical treatment he needs. Ukrainian doctors must be allowed to see him while he remains in detention, as required by a recent injunction from the European Court of Human Rights. His case is yet another instance in the series of blatant human rights violations committed by Russian authorities against Ukrainian citizens. Pavlo Hryb's case also features the illegal abduction of an individual in the territory of a third country. The EU also calls on the Russian authorities for the immediate and unconditional release of Crimean Tatar activist Edem Bekirov who was detained on 12 December upon entry into the Crimean peninsula. Mr Edem Bekirov is in poor health and needs daily medical assistance. His access to urgent and appropriate medical care must be ensured. His detention on the Crimean peninsula forms part of a worrying trend of attacks on the vital work conducted by human rights defenders to protect the rights of Crimean Tatars and of those who do not recognise the illegal annexation of the peninsula by the Russian Federation. The EU expects all illegally detained Ukrainian citizens in Russia and on the Crimean peninsula to be released unconditionally and without delay and we stress that international human rights observers must be granted full, free and unhindered access to the Crimean peninsula.

The EU remains firm in its call on all sides to swiftly and fully implement the Minsk agreements and honor their commitments in full in order to achieve a sustainable political solution to the conflict in line with OSCE principles and commitments. We call on Russia to fully assume its responsibility in this regard and to use its considerable influence over the armed formations it backs to meet the Minsk commitments in full. Respect for these principles and commitments must be restored. In this context we reiterate our condemnation of the so-called "elections" that took place on 11 November 2018 in the non-government controlled territories. We do not recognise them. We again call on Russia to immediately stop fueling the conflict by providing financial and military support to the armed formations, and we remain deeply concerned about information on the presence of Russian military equipment and personnel in areas held by Russia-backed armed formations. 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 uphold these fundamental principles that it has itself invoked many times and to contribute, by acts and public pronouncements, to stabilising the situation and reversing moves that contravene these principles. We strongly condemn the clear violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity by acts of aggression by the Russian armed forces since February 2014 and the illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol to the Russian Federation, which we will not recognise. 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 EFTA countries ICELAND, NORWAY and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, as well as 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.