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R E M A R K S

by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton following the extraordinary Foreign Affairs Council on Ukraine

"As you know, I called today the meeting of EU foreign ministers because of the extremely worrying developments in Ukraine, the second such meeting in less than two weeks. We discussed the situation over several hours.

As you will see in the conclusions we have agreed, we condemned the clear violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity by an act of aggression of the Russian armed forces and the authorisation of the use of the Russian armed forces on the territory of Ukraine.

Without question this is in breach of Russia's international obligations and its commitments.

We are firmly convinced that there needs to be a peaceful solution to this current crisis, in full respect of international law.

We call on Russia to immediately withdraw its troops to the areas where they are permanently stationed on the basis of the agreement for the Black Sea Fleet stationed in Ukraine.

We also call on Russia to agree to the request of Ukraine to hold consultations and to take part in urgent consultations amongst all signatories and adherents of the Budapest Memorandum of 1994.

FOR FURTHER DETAILS:

Michael Mann +32 498 999 780 - +32 2 584 9780- Michael.Mann@eeas.europa.eu @EUHighRepSpox
Maja Kocijancic +32 498 984 425 - +32 2 298 65 70 - Maja.Kocijancic@ec.europa.eu @AshtonSpox Maja

Sebastien Brabant +32 460 75 09 98 - Sebastien.Brabant@ec.europa.eu

Eamonn Prendergast +32 460 75 32 93 – Eamonn.Prendergast@ec.europa.eu

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We will continue to promote any constructive dialogue aimed at reaching a peaceful solution and continue our ongoing engagement in international facilitation efforts, working with the UN, the OSCE, and other international organisations.

We also welcome the possible OSCE fact-finding mission.

In the absence of de-escalating steps by Russia, the EU will decide what the consequences will be for bilateral relations between the EU and Russia. We talked about the potential of suspending the bilateral talks on visa matters and the New Agreement and we will consider targeted measures.

Today, we also commended the measured response shown so far by Ukraine. We stand by the efforts of the new government to try and stabilise the situation.

We recognised the importance of inclusiveness at all levels of government, including reaching out to regions and ensuring an adequate level of protection of national minorities.

We also support the efforts of the government to pursue reforms.

As you know, we are working with the international community and international financial institutions, especially the IMF, on an international assistance package to address the urgent economic needs of Ukraine, based on that commitment to reform.

To that end, today in Kyiv we have sent a fact-finding mission from the European Commission to start that work.

And finally we once again confirmed our offer of the Association Agreement as well as our commitment to enhancing people to people contacts."
