



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council No 1147
Vienna, 25 May 2017**

**EU statement on “Russia’s Ongoing Aggression Against
Ukraine and Illegal Annexation of Crimea”**

Time and time again the European Union has joined many others in clearly condemning the continued restrictions and intimidation of the SMM that primarily occur in areas held by Russia-backed separatists. We have denounced the unacceptable risks that the separatists’ disinformation campaign, along with cases of intimidation, pose to the security of the SMM’s monitors, and we have decried the restrictions which limit the Mission’s ability to fulfil its mandate. Yet despite this, both restrictions and intimidation continue to take place with alarming frequency. Last week, we pointed to evidence that separatists are instructed to stop SMM patrols and to deny SMM passage unless they are on “planned routes”; since then, the SMM has reported several incidents where separatists have clearly – and explicitly –denied the SMM access based on these instructions. Likewise, incidents of aggressive intimidation, harassment and hostility towards the SMM persist: on 17 May, near separatist-held Dokuchaievsk, one separatist in a group of six wearing military-style clothes threw a smoke-generating device in front of an SMM vehicle. Once again, we repeat in the strongest terms: 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 these unacceptable restrictions and intimidation. We call on the sides to ensure a safe environment for the SMM to fulfil its mandate.

What is urgently needed is an end to impunity. It is simply unacceptable that such grave threats to the SMM and its work go unchallenged. We are shocked by attempts to downplay these incidents: appallingly, separatists have referred to the sexual harassment on 5 May of a female monitor as a “bad joke” or dismissed it as a “conflict of cultures”. Accountability must be ensured in all cases of threats,

intimidation and restrictions. Without proper and unimpeded monitoring by the SMM, no objective reporting will be possible, which constitutes the basis for a credible and verified improvement of the security situation, which is paramount for further progress on the political track of the peace process. We will not waver in our full support to the SMM.

We welcome the establishment of an external investigation into the fatal incident affecting SMM, as announced by the Secretary General. It is of utmost importance for the security of the SMM that the circumstances of this incident are analysed thoroughly and independently. Those responsible for the death of Mr Joseph Stone and the injury of two other SMM patrol members on 23 April must be held to account.

Accountability is also imperative to breaking the negative security dynamic that persists in eastern Ukraine. In the period of 8-14 May, despite its patrolling restrictions, the SMM recorded a sharp increase of 75 per cent in ceasefire violations. They also reported a significant increase in violence along the contact line and the use of Minsk-proscribed weapons. The humanitarian cost remains high: the SMM has confirmed 205 civilian casualties in 2017 alone, an increase of more than 120 per cent compared to the same period in 2016. We once again urge all sides to take immediate steps to ensure full respect for the ceasefire, the withdrawal of Minsk-proscribed weapons, complete disengagement and comprehensive action on marking, fencing and clearing mines. The European Union will continue to hold the sides accountable, assessing their compliance by their deeds, not by their words. We expect sides to live up to their responsibility to mark, fence and clear areas contaminated by mines and unexploded ordnance, and we once again underline the need for the JCCC to fulfil its coordination role as laid out in the TCG decision on mine clearance.

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