



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council N° 1172
Vienna, 18 January 2017**

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

Mr. Chairperson, let me take this opportunity to first and foremost welcome the release of more than 300 detainees conducted on December 27 last year. It was an important humanitarian gesture long awaited by the detainees themselves and their families and an important step in view of building confidence between the sides. We commend those who made this possible, including the Trilateral Contact Group, the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission and the International Committee of the Red Cross as well as the Normandy format. However, many more are detained and we strongly urge for further efforts towards their release.

The release of detainees rounded off a year that, regrettably, was marked by an increase in ceasefire violations and a higher number of Minsk proscribed weapons in violation of withdrawal lines compared to 2016. We therefore welcomed the recommitment to the ceasefire by the sides on December 20. Regrettably, a sustained and comprehensive ceasefire is yet to be achieved and we are deeply concerned that the number of ceasefire violations is once again on the increase. Between January 8 and 13 alone, the SMM recorded as many as 1547 explosions and we once again remind all sides of the risk that this poses to civilians living close to the contact line. Since 18 December 2017 the SMM confirmed 20 civilian casualties - of which two lost their lives. We call on the sides to cease all hostilities immediately as required by the Minsk agreements. We also reiterate our call to swiftly disengage, withdraw all Minsk-proscribed weapons and ensure humanitarian access.

We remain concerned over restrictions to the SMM’s freedom of movement that occur almost exclusively in areas held by Russian-backed separatists. Close to Verkhnochyrokyvske, an area near the border with the Russian Federation armed

men stopped the SMM three times during the reporting period at a checkpoint. Armed men denied the SMM access to permanent storage sites and heavy weapon holding areas in five instances. Such impediments, as well as hostile behaviour towards the SMM in separatist-controlled Makiivka on 3 January or shots towards an SMM UAV on 12 January in Pavlopil are unacceptable and must stop immediately. We remind all participating states that the mandate of the SMM calls for full, safe and unhindered access throughout Ukraine including along the Ukrainian-Russian border.

In this context, we call on Russia to return to the JCCC. We are closely following ongoing high-level efforts by Ukraine and Russia to restore the functionality of the JCCC. The JCCC has served as a stabilizing mechanism in co-ordinating local ceasefires, security guarantees and ensuring repair and maintenance of infrastructure vital for the civilian population on both sides of the line of contact in eastern Ukraine. The JCCC has also supported the operations of the SMM and contributed to ensuring the Mission's safety.

We regret that another so-called “humanitarian convoy” consisting of 16 cargo trucks and 5 support vehicles from Russia was observed on Ukrainian territory on December 21, 2017. When the SMM attempted to access the compound into which one of the trucks had entered, two armed members of the so called “LPR” denied its access. Mr. Chairperson, the presence of these so-called “humanitarian convoys” 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 agreements foresee 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. Restoring respect for these principles is crucial. 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 the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of 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, LIECHTENSTEIN 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.