EU Statement on “Special Session: Ensuring security and stability in the OSCE region in the light of developments with respect to Ukraine”

The European Union welcomes this special session and thanks the speakers for their presentations. More than four years have passed since the Russian Federation illegally annexed the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol and began its acts of aggression in eastern Ukraine in violation of international law and core OSCE principles and commitments. This ongoing conflict poses the most serious challenge to European security and to the European security order with dire consequences on the ground. The human toll continues to rise: the fighting has left more than 11,000 dead and thousands injured, millions of civilians have been forced from their homes, and the human rights situation in areas held by Russia-backed separatists and on the illegally annexed Crimean peninsula has severely deteriorated. To solve this conflict, respect for OSCE principles must be restored and the Russian Federation must reverse acts that contravene fundamental OSCE principles and international law.

We strongly condemn the persisting lack of respect for the ceasefire along the line of contact, lack of withdrawal of heavy weapons and the indiscriminate shelling of residential areas and critical civilian infrastructure. We regret that the commitments made so far to ensure a lasting stable security environment have not been respected. This puts at high risk the lives of hundreds of thousands of people on both sides of the contact line. Safety zones around critical civilian infrastructure and a conducive security environment to repair civil infrastructure facilities must be established urgently. The protection of the Donetsk Filtration Station is important to ensure that hundreds of thousands of civilians retain access to water. The humanitarian and ecological risks associated with shelling of civilian infrastructure are imminent. It is also crucial to carry out comprehensive
de-mining, especially around approaches to the few entry-exit checkpoints that exist.

The role of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission remains invaluable. On the ground, the SMM is continuously adapting to difficult circumstances to reduce tensions and to diligently, objectively and impartially monitor and verify the sides’ adherence to relevant Minsk provisions. We deplore that the SMM continues to face significant restrictions in its freedom of movement and its access, particularly in areas held by Russia-backed armed formations. We cannot and must not accept any attempts to blind our own Mission – either through threats to our monitors or attacks on our technological assets. The SMM must be ensured safe, secure and unimpeded access throughout Ukraine, including along the Ukrainian-Russian state border and to the illegally annexed Crimea. Without proper and unimpeded monitoring by the Mission, there cannot be a credible and verified improvement of the security situation, which is the basis for further progress on the political track of the peace process. We recall that the EU and its Member States account for two thirds of both the mission’s budget and monitors and we will continue to support this vitally important Mission.

The EU deplores the particularly grave human rights situation in the non-government controlled areas of the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. The EU underlines the need to resume the exchange of prisoners and illegally detained persons. We call on the Russian Federation to free and release without further delay all illegally detained Ukrainian citizens both in the Russian Federation and the illegally annexed Crimean peninsula. UNGA Resolution 72/190 of 19 December 2017 on human rights in Crimea must be implemented, including Russia’s obligations under international humanitarian law. Access of international human rights actors to the whole territory of Ukraine, including the Crimean peninsula, remains of paramount importance. The EU condemns the systemic persecution and intimidation of the Crimean Tatars and those who do not recognise the illegal annexation. We will continue to draw attention to human rights abuses.

The conflict must be solved peacefully and in full respect for international law and principles. The EU stands fully behind the diplomatic efforts that are taking place in the Normandy Four format. We appreciate the most recent discussion among
ministers. We fully support the tireless work of the Trilateral Contact Group. Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Martin Sajdik continues his vital work in the Trilateral Contact Group along with the Coordinators of the four working groups. However, although their remarkable efforts have yielded some results, many significant challenges remain. The EU remains firm in its call on all sides to swiftly and fully implement the Minsk agreements and honour their commitments in order to achieve a sustainable political solution in line with OSCE principles and commitments. We call on Russia to fully assume its responsibility in this regard. We recall that the duration of the European Union’s economic sanctions against Russia is linked to the complete implementation of the Minsk agreements.

The EU reaffirms its resolute support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity, within its internationally recognised borders. The EU does not recognise and continues to condemn the illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol by the Russian Federation, which is a violation of international law. We also condemn the violation of international law through the recent partial opening and further ongoing construction of the Kerch Strait Bridge. The EU remains committed to fully implementing its non-recognition policy, including through restrictive measures.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA* and the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN 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.