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EU Statement on "Russia's Ongoing Aggression against Ukraine and Illegal Occupation of Crimea"

Mr. Chairperson, last week Ambassadors Apakan and Sajdik underlined once again that a sustainable ceasefire in eastern Ukraine cannot happen before the sides show the necessary political will and translate this political will into withdrawal of heavy weapons, disengagement and comprehensive demining. Regrettably, the SMM continued to report a substantial increase in the use of Minsk-proscribed weapons and ceasefire violations inside the Zolote disengagement area and in violation of the Trilateral Contact Group's Framework Decision on Disengagement of Forces and Hardware as well as new mine hazard signs on both sides of the contact line. We urge the sides to adhere to the commitments they have themselves signed up to, work towards a comprehensive and durable ceasefire and end the suffering of civilians in eastern Ukraine.

Efforts must be increased to open more entry-exit checkpoints and improve the conditions around the existing ones. Civilians are suffering and risking their lives while waiting for hours to cross. The cold winter temperatures have further compounded the dangers of crossing over the wooden ramps at the broken section of the bridge at Stanytsia Luhanska and in addition, a piece of UXO north of the wooden ramps has not yet been removed, thus continuing to pose a threat to civilians crossing the contact line as well as the SMM. The SMM has established that twelve people have died between December 21st and February 5th while attempting to cross during these difficult conditions. The Normandy format has recently called on the TCG to address a series of urgent humanitarian issues such as facilitating the crossing of the contact line. Actions to alleviate the situation should be taken by the sides without further delay.

On 4 February, an SMM patrol positioned near a checkpoint of the Ukrainian Armed Forces at the Zolote disengagement heard five undetermined explosions less than

3km east and south-south-east followed by three explosions assessed as impacts. Immediately afterwards, the patrol heard an increasing number of ceasefire violations. We strongly condemn any threats to the SMM's safe, secure, unconditional and unhindered freedom of movement throughout Ukraine, including Crimea and along the Ukraine-Russia state border and underline that the sides are responsible for keeping our monitors safe.

We remain concerned that Russia-backed armed formations continue to systematically deny the SMM access to certain border areas and the coastal line east of Mariupol, and that Russia continues to prevent the SMM from accessing the illegally annexed Crimean peninsula, in violation of the SMM mandate. Such obstruction raises clear concerns about what is being hidden from the SMM. We further reiterate our condemnation of the continued targeting of SMM assets and repeat our call on the Russian Federation to provide us with a substantial explanation regarding the downing of the SMM LR UAV on 27 October last year. We underline that the operational, security and financial consequences of all obstructions must be assessed. Those responsible for any wilful damage, destruction or loss of SMM UAVs and other assets should be held accountable, both politically and financially.

Our position on Russia's violation of international law in the Kerch Strait and Azov Sea on 25 November last year is well known. Russia's aggressive actions also affect the security situation in the entire Black Sea region. We strongly call on Russia to release the crew members and return their vessels unconditionally and without delay.

The EU reiterates its call on Russia to immediately release Ukrainian citizen Pavlo Hryb who has been detained by Russian authorities without any clear charges since he was abducted on 24 August 2017. The North Caucasus District Court has dismissed an appeal for his transfer to house arrest despite his critical health conditions and urgent need for surgery and we call on Russia to provide him with the medical care he urgently requires. We also call on Russia to immediately release Crimean Tatar Edem Bekirov who was detained on 12 December 2018. He has been denied treatment for his severe health conditions and must have urgent access to appropriate medical care.

Mr Chairperson, free elections, transparent and accountable institutions, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms are at the heart of our democracies. We

acknowledge the crucial role of ODIHR in strengthening democratic societies and accountable institutions across the OSCE area, including through its electoral assistance and deployment of election observation missions. We thus fully support the preparation, the conduct and follow-up of ODIHR's election observation activities without undue restrictions and limitations imposed by participating States.

With regard to the upcoming Ukrainian Presidential elections, while we note the concerns raised by Ukraine, we expect Ukraine to fully uphold its OSCE commitments, including those taken in Copenhagen in 1990, and reiterate our support to ODIHR in conducting its observation in line with the existing methodology.

The EU remains firm in its 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 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. We again call on Russia to immediately stop fuelling 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*, 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.