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

07/11/2016 - 09:52



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council No 1116
Vienna, 27 October 2016**

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Ukraine and Illegal Occupation of Crimea”**

The European Union welcomes the headway achieved at the summit meeting in the Normandy Format held in Berlin on 19 October, including the reaffirmation of the importance of the ceasefire, the need to disengage and to ensure full, safe and unhindered access for the SMM and international humanitarian actors. We urge the sides to build on this. With the number of ceasefire violations rising last week to levels not observed by the SMM since late August – prior to the sides’ recommitment to the ceasefire – the sides should take swift steps to fully and verifiably disengage in all designated areas and agree to further such areas, to strictly adhere to the ceasefire and verifiably withdraw all Minsk-regulated weapons. These are necessary steps in order to ensure a sustainable political solution in line with OSCE principles and commitments.

We are concerned by the spike in mid-October in fighting near Mariupol, with over 500 explosions noted by the SMM on 12 October alone. The toll on civilians is profound and tragic. We deplore the concentration of military equipment in civilian areas near Mariupol, particularly evident in areas held by Russia-backed separatists, as reported by SMM.

The SMM’s freedom of movement continues to face significant obstacles, particularly in the disengagement areas due to the failure of the sides to remove or fence off mines and unexploded ordnance in line with the Framework Agreement and due to the failure of the JCCC to coordinate and facilitate this process. This is unacceptable. The SMM must have full, safe and unhindered access throughout Ukraine, in particular to the disengagement areas and also along the Ukrainian-Russian State border. To this end, we also call for all obstacles to be removed to allow the SMM to set up planned Forward Patrol

Bases in Amvrosivka and Antratsit as they have repeatedly asked for. This would be a necessary step towards giving the SMM better conditions for observation in border areas.

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 holding local elections in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in 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 be met. We also reiterate our call on the sides to agree on the exchange of prisoners and detainees.

We remain firm in our call on all sides to swiftly and fully implement the Minsk agreements and honour their commitments in full. We underline Russia's responsibility in this regard and yet again call on Russia to use its considerable influence over the separatists it backs to meet those commitments in full. Moreover, we again call on Russia to immediately stop providing financial and military support to the separatists. The ceasefire must be respected. All Minsk-regulated weapons must be withdrawn and foreign armed formations, military equipment and mercenaries removed from Ukraine. Re-establishing full Ukrainian control over its state border is essential. We reiterate our deep concern 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, 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 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, GEORGIA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.