



**Permanent Mission of Ukraine**  
to the International Organizations in Vienna

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## **Statement on “Russia’s on-going aggression against Ukraine and illegal occupation of Crimea”**

As delivered by Ihor Lossovskyi,  
Deputy Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,  
to the 1156<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Permanent Council,  
31 August 2017

**Mr. Chairperson,**

Next Tuesday, on 5 September, we will mark three years since the first document of the Minsk Agreements – the Protocol – was signed by the TCG following the direct intervention by the Russian regular troops into Donbas, which took place in August 2014. This shameful and felonious incursion caused hundreds of casualties among Ukrainian servicemen defending their soil, most notably near the city of Ilovaysk where 366 of them were killed and 429 wounded while moving through the so-called “green corridor” under the guarantees of commanders of the Russian forces.

Regretfully, the very first provision of the Protocol on the ceasefire, which retained its undeniable priority in the Minsk Memorandum and Package of Measures signed later, remains unfulfilled by the Russian side. The Russian-Ukrainian conflict, which started with the illegal occupation and attempted annexation of Ukraine’s Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, continues to inflict injuries and take human lives: only in the first half of this year, there were recorded more than 400 civilian casualties, a 61% increase compared to the same period in 2016. Since the last PC meeting, the hybrid Russian forces have violated ceasefire around one thousand times, 25% of which were carried out by the Minsk-proscribed weapons. 22 Ukrainian servicemen were killed and 117 were wounded.

The most recent attempt to establish a comprehensive and sustainable ceasefire was made following the phone call held on 22 August by the Heads of State and Government of the “Normandy” format and the decision taken by the TCG on 23 August to announce a ceasefire from midnight on 25 August on the occasion of the beginning of the school year. The decision was warmly welcomed by OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Chief Monitor of the SMM, OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Special Representative in Ukraine and in the TCG. The Ukrainian side, as reported by the SMM, has given the orders to unit commanders prohibiting the use of any weapons commencing on 25 August 2017, but retaining the right to return fire in case of a real threat to life of servicemen and civilian population, as well as attempts to

alter the contact line. Those instructions have been strictly fulfilled by the Ukrainian servicemen.

While the SMM recorded fewer ceasefire violations in both Donetsk and Luhansk regions compared with the previous periods, it keeps registering the regular armed provocations by the Russian hybrid forces along the contact line in Donbas: in Avdiivka, Vodian, Mayorsk, Luhanske, Zaytseve, Shyrokyne etc. Having in mind the large-scale military exercises “West-2017” due to be held in September in Russia and Belarus in close vicinity to the Ukrainian borders, the security situation in Donbas, which remains fragile and volatile, can be sharply aggravated by the Russian side at any moment.

Despite the recently slightly improved security environment, which still has to prove its sustainability, the Russia-backed illegal armed formations continue their practice of intimidating the SMM and preventing it from fulfilling its mandate. As informed by the SMM in its weekly report of 23 August, during the week “the Mission’s freedom of movement was restricted 15 times, all of which occurred in areas not under government control” (in addition to restrictions of the SMM’s freedom of movement due to observed or potential presence of mines and unexploded ordnance). The most blatant case took place on 26 August, when the armed militants stopped the SMM near Yasynuvata, cited orders from their superiors that the SMM was not allowed to conduct an UAV flight over the Donetsk Filtration Station and added that if the SMM flew the UAV, it would be shot down.

As it was repeatedly informed in the previous meetings of the Permanent Council, the SMM patrols do not encounter the same behavior while carrying out their activities in government-controlled territories. The Mission is able to register the efforts undertaken by the Ukrainian authorities to bring a secure and peaceful life back to the civilians of Donbas region of Ukraine, including demining undergoing near government-controlled Blyzhnie reported by the relevant SMM reports of 25 and 28 August.

### **Distinguished colleagues,**

The month, which passed since the previous meeting of the Permanent Council took place, was marked by the on-going flagrant violations of Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity by the Russian Federation.

On 30 July, the President of Russia signed the bill easing the procedure of obtaining Russian citizenship for Ukrainian citizens, under which those wishing to acquire it would no longer need to provide the Russian authorities with paper certification from the Ukrainian authorities that they were abdicating their Ukrainian citizenship. We consider it as total disregard of the aggressor state towards the international law and the sovereignty of other states, as the renunciation of citizenship is exclusively defined by the national legislation of the relevant state.

On 4 August and 18 August, the Prime Minister and the President of Russia accordingly visited the temporarily occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. The MFA of Ukraine has consistently emphasized the inadmissibility of Russian officials’ presence in Ukraine’s internationally recognized borders without prior consent of the Ukrainian authorities.

On 24 August, as reported by the SMM, another Russian convoy moved into Ukraine through the Donetsk Border Crossing Point. This continued practice of sending the so-called Russian «humanitarian convoys» to the armed militants-controlled areas of Donbas in violation of the Ukrainian legislation and international law remains of particular concern for Ukraine. We reiterate that the humanitarian assistance be delivered based on the international mechanism as envisaged by the Minsk agreements.

**Mr. Chairperson,**

The release and exchange of all hostages and illegally held persons, based on the principle of “all for all”, remains another commitment under the Minsk agreements, which Russia fails to implement. At least 140 Ukrainians are held hostages by Russia-backed illegal armed formations in certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine, other 15 Ukrainians are illegally detained in the Russian Federation, as well as at least 29 in the Russia-occupied Crimea, their human rights and fundamental freedoms being blatantly neglected.

Over the past month at least five politically motivated sentences of imprisonment were announced, seven people were arrested or fined in Crimea. Mass searches and arrests of Crimean Tatars became daily routine in Crimea. On 27 July, the Russian Supreme Court increased the prison sentence from 12 to 15 years for a citizen of Ukraine Ruslan Zeytullaiev who was illegally convicted under the fabricated pretext. On 4 August, the Russian occupation court in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea convicted a citizen of Ukraine Volodymyr Balukh, also under the fabricated pretext, to nearly 4 years of imprisonment solely for his conscious civil position and peaceful opposition to the illegal occupation of his native land through hoisting a Ukrainian flag over his house in Crimea.

On 14 August 2017 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine expressed its categorical protest and outrage over yet another wave of political repressions and human rights violations by the Kremlin regarding the citizens of Ukraine. As we witness the sharply deteriorating human rights situation in Russia-occupied Crimea and Donbas, we call on the international community to intensify political and diplomatic pressure on Russia in order to release the illegally detained Ukrainian citizens and stop large-scale human rights abuses in the occupied Crimea and Donbas.

**Distinguished colleagues,**

Yesterday, we marked the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances, which reminds us on the victims of abductions, enforced disappearances, tortures and murders taking place as a result of the Russian military aggression against Ukraine. We are deeply concerned by the fact that this illegal and shameful activity is regularly used by the Russian occupation regime in Crimea and Donbas to silence the dissenting voices of those who do not agree with Russia's actions and flagrant violations of international law. We reiterate our firm position that any enforced disappearances must be effectively, promptly, thoroughly and

impartially investigated with a view to bringing those responsible to justice and preventing a further recurrence.

In this regard, we are alarmed over the disappearance of 19-year old Ukrainian citizen Pavlo Gryb in Belarus on 24 August. As his father, a retired Ukrainian officer, was informed by the Belarusian authorities, Pavlo had been put on the Russian FSB wanted list. According to some accounts, the Ukrainian citizen might have been abducted and transferred by the Russian secret services from the territory of Belarus to Russia. Despite our efforts and relevant requests the destiny and whereabouts of Pavlo Gryb remain unknown.

If confirmed, the incident will prove to the Russian unwillingness to give up the criminal practice of abduction and illegal detention of the Ukrainian citizens, broadly applied since the very beginning of the Russian aggression. However, it will be the first time for such a crime to take place on the territory of a third country. Ukraine takes this situation very seriously and expects the Belarusian authorities to demonstrate a responsible approach in resolving this incident to avoid harmful effect for the bilateral relations.

We call upon the Russian side to demonstrate the necessary political will to implement the Minsk agreements, most notably their security and humanitarian aspects, as well as to revert the illegal occupation of the Crimean Peninsula, which remain the main obstacles for the peaceful resolution of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict with full respect for the OSCE principles and commitments as well as restoration of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.

**Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.**