



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International
Organizations in Vienna

Statement on Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine and illegal occupation of Crimea

As delivered by Ambassador Yevhenii Tsymbaliuk,
Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,
to the 1354th meeting of the Permanent Council

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Mr. Chairperson,

The security situation in the territories occupied by the Russian Federation and alongside of Ukraine's border remains tense and fragile.

Cynically, while Minister Lavrov is sending out letters to the participating States with the reference to OSCE commitments, Russia's gun remains pointed at Ukraine.

However, the truth is that by amassing its regular troops on the borders of sovereign states, by occupying parts of their territories and by threatening its neighbours with the readiness to launch a deadly attack, Russia by its own actions creates different levels of security in the OSCE areas and strengthens its security at the expense of others.

In view of that, how can this state seek for trust given that it has already got an extensive track record in its recent history of trying to punish its neighbours for the exercise of freedom of choice? Not formal letters aimed to distract our attention, but concrete actions on behalf of this country are needed to regain trust.

Whatever options Russia may try to impose for Ukraine, but the fact speaks for itself when earlier this week the Kremlin's spokesperson was hasty to deny reaching any understanding of taking steps on the de-escalation on Ukraine's borders. Do we have any illusions about Russia's attempts to coerce Ukraine, if Ukraine is left alone?

Compared with the previous week, the number of the Russian troops alongside Ukraine's border continues growing. Currently, it consists of increasing number of tactical battalion groups, which amounts to 120 000 regular troops. And it is not to forget about 1600 tanks, 4000 armoured combat vehicles, over 2200 pieces of artillery, I mentioned about in my previous statements. In parallel, ten helicopters were redeployed to Kursk. It is about 100 km from the Ukrainian border in the Sumy region.

There is another worrying trend. We are closely looking into Russia's intention to close areas in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov for missile and artillery exercises from 13 of February to 19 of February. We are concerned about unprecedented scale of drills and its negative impact on the freedom of navigation.

Apart from that, illegal military activities in the training areas in the occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions are getting to be already a routine practice.

On 5 February, the SMM reported about 61 tanks, 20 howitzers and six antitank guns in the training areas near Myrne, Luhansk region. The Mission also observed the presence of 50 armoured combat vehicles, six armoured signals and command vehicles, one trench digger and one anti-aircraft gun.

On 8 February, the SMM reported about 23 tanks, 24 howitzers, and four towed howitzers/anti-tank guns in training areas near Shymshynivka, Myrne and Kruhlyk

The SMM also saw a total of 21 newly installed pillbox bunkers along a local road leading east toward the occupied Ohulchansk. We call upon the Russian Federation to stop the preparation for new escalation and provocations.

In this situation preserving of the efficient and full-fledged monitoring by OSCE SMM on the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine in Donetsk and Luhansk regions, especially in the border areas is of foremost importance. Moreover, such monitoring should be conducted by SMM with redoubled efforts and active use of all available arsenals of technical equipment and UAV fleet and definitely without reducing in any way its monitoring capability, human or technical.

At the last PC meeting I quoted an open letter signed by Russian intelligentsia. In particular, it was said that "a policy based on promoting the idea of a war is immoral, irresponsible, and criminal".

However, the use of UAVs to attack and drop shells on the civilian objects is not only immoral but also amounts to a war crime. Unfortunately, over the last week we saw the intensification of such practices, which are of indiscriminate nature.

Attack by Russian armed formations on the EECF Hnutove with use of UAV endangers civilians, undermines ceasefire regime and degrades environment for use of SMM UAVs.

So, has the Russian Federation decided that the artificial restrictions already imposed on the crossing of the contact line are not enough, and it is time for physical intimidation in order to bring the number of crossings to zero?

On another day, Pavlopil settlement, close to Mariupol, was targeted with four shells with the use of UAVs by the Russian armed formations - school and residential house were damaged.

We call upon the Russian Federation to take all necessary measures to ensure appropriate environment for the use of SMM UAVs, including by withdrawing its electronic warfare systems.

It is also high time to stop such intimidating practices against civilians.

They have to enjoy full and safe access to the territories controlled by the Government of Ukraine.

Opening of the two additional EECFs as well as making all other EECFs fully operational would significantly ease the life of civilians.

As well, the Russian Federation has to revoke all its decisions aimed to consolidate its control over the occupied territories, including passportization.

At the same time, average 233 ceasefire violations per day, while number of violations in the vicinity of the Donetsk Filtration Station is increasing, is of particular concern for us.

As I repeat every our meeting, the first priority today is to achieve a sustainable and unconditional ceasefire in Donbas. The ceasefire regime must be guaranteed, reliable, and on this basis, further steps can be taken.

This is about the safety of civilians, about the integrity of critical infrastructure and it is about the implementation of the very basic provision of the Minsk agreements.

To that end, we call upon the Russian Federation to engage constructively into the talks as a party to the conflict within the Normandy format as well as within the TCG.

Distinguished colleagues,

The best security guarantee that Russia is looking for is to withdraw from the occupied territories together with its troops as well as to release all citizens of Ukraine illegally detained by the Russian occupation administrations.

However, another wave of searches in the houses of Crimean Tatars was conducted in the occupied Crimea two days ago. Four activists – Ansar Osmanov, Ametkhan Abdulvapov, Marlen Mustafaiev and Ernest Seitosmanov – were detained.

Russian courts continue issuing illegal and trumped-up verdicts aiming to silence any dissenting voice in the occupied peninsula.

Another politically motivated court verdict against Ukrainian citizen is expected in the coming days. I am talking about political prisoner Zekirya Muratov, 64-year severely disabled person. He has to be released, not sentenced.

At the same time, the tortures are used to fabricate the case against Nariman Dzhelyal as well as in other cases.

We will continue using all available political and diplomatic means, including ongoing and future proceedings in international courts, in order to bring Russia to justice and fully restore Ukraine's territorial integrity.

To conclude, we urge the Russian Federation to stop its aggression against Ukraine, reverse its illegal occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, de-occupy certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, and restore freedom of navigation in the Black Sea, through the Kerch Strait and in the Sea of Azov. Russia must fully implement its commitments under the Minsk agreements and agreements within the Normandy format, including the withdrawal of its armed forces, mercenaries, armed formations, and weapons from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.

Thank you, Mr.Chairperson.