



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International Organizations in Vienna

Statement by the Delegation of Ukraine
at the 945th FSC Plenary Meeting

(06 May 2020, Hofburg)

(Agenda item 1, Security Dialog: COVID - 19 and its impact on the politico-military aspects of security in the OSCE region).

Mr. Chairperson,

The Delegation of Ukraine thanks OSCE Secretary General for his presentation on the topic **“COVID-19 and its impact on the politico-military aspects of security in the OSCE region”** today. We consider this event as a unique opportunity for a detailed collective discussion on the complex situation and possible solutions.

The Ukrainian delegation, in connection with the consideration of such an important topic as **“COVID-19”**, within the framework of the security dialogue today, would like to focus on the epidemiological situation in the territories of Ukraine, temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation (RF).

The spread of **COVID-19** has aggravated threats, stemming from the Russia-Ukraine conflict, for the entire region. In this regard we remind all participating states of the call made by **the UN Secretary General for a full and comprehensive ceasefire** during the pandemic. This is specifically pertinent for Donbas. During the recent N4 Ministerial VTC, we have urged Russia to reciprocate our efforts to launch **a new ceasefire regime** – due to COVID-19 pandemic, that might become an important step to the progress of peaceful resolution.

At the same time, the RF fails to take sufficient measures, as an occupying State under the rules of international humanitarian law, to protect the life and health of the population of the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, under conditions of the spread of the acute respiratory illness, COVID-19.

In particular, human rights organizations report a lack of overall health care and low coverage of the population with coronavirus diagnostics, in temporary occupied territories of Crimea and Donbas. The Russian occupation administrations in the region, conceal data about the situation concerning disease spread and artificially lower (according to intelligence agencies - at least 2-2.5 times) “official” statistics concerning identified COVID-19 cases by making another diagnosis despite the symptoms of the coronavirus disease. Just over the

week of 17-24 March, in **Luhansk** hospital N7, **nine patients died** with the diagnosis of “**pneumonia**”. According to information at our disposal, all of them had symptoms, typical for COVID-19, but it was prohibited for the doctors to note these facts in their medical reports.

At the same time, international organizations and other independent sources are unable to verify information of the Russian occupation administrations about the spread of coronavirus disease in Crimea and Donbas. Both occupation administrations, for a long time, denied (until 22.04.20 – in the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, until recently – in the temporarily occupied Crimea and the city Sevastopol) the lethal cases. According to the occupation administrations, for the time being (5 May 2020) there are 219 COVID-19 cases acknowledged in Crimea, including 3 deaths, and 162 cases in the temporarily occupied territories of Luhansk region, including 1 death, 133 – in those of Donetsk region, including 4 deaths.

There is also a lack of medical personnel in the temporarily occupied territories (and the level of the disease spread among medics is high), medical substances, means of personal protections, sanitizers, and tests, which makes understanding the real picture nearly impossible.

While one of the main sources of contamination remains from people travelling to/from Moscow, regular flights and road transportation are still operational from the territory of RF to Crimea. Massively organised visits by buses from temporarily occupied Donetsk and Luhansk to the Russian territory for passportization were reported in April. **The presence of Russian troops** stationed in the temporarily occupied territories on the rotation principle is an additional factor of COVID-19 spread.

Restrictions of access for international organisations and humanitarian missions to the temporarily occupied territories deprive population of critical aid and the world community – of verified information. In the conditions of the on-going armed aggression and de-facto closure of the temporarily occupied territories of Donbas for the OSCE, UN institutions, the International Committee of the Red Cross and other humanitarian NGOs, local residents have found themselves in the role of hostages vulnerable to the threat of pandemic.

Members of the armed formations of the Russian Federation continue to restrict the freedom of movement of OSCE SMM observers through the contact line, which prevents the mission from fulfilling its mandate. In addition, not counting restrictions on disengagement sites and those posed by mines, the freedom of movement of the SMM observers was restricted 18 times, all of which happened in the temporarily occupied territories, during 20-26 April. Seventeen of these were restrictions related to the COVID-19 outbreak imposed at checkpoints of the armed formations of the Russian Federation.

The Russian Federation must provide full and comprehensive access to the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, including the section of the Ukrainian-Russian state border. It is a Russian commitment under the Minsk agreements that

were reaffirmed at the latest meeting of the Normandy Four leaders on 9 December 2019, but it remains unimplemented.

We sent a note verbale to the Russian Federation, reminding it of its responsibilities under international humanitarian law to ensure protection of the lives and health of people living in the territories under its control.

Despite the pandemic, Russia continues to illegally militarize the Crimean Peninsula. This only aggravates the spread of coronavirus infection. Military units and the security forces of the occupying state continue their exercises, including the 9th of May parade rehearsals held up until late April, combat training, and economic activities in the temporary occupied areas in Crimea and Donbas, creating more risks of the disease spreading among the civil population.

In the temporarily occupied Crimea, construction sites at the military facilities in the Omega Bay area and Belbek airport became, among others, the infection spread hotspots.

In flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, this spring, Russia plans to conscript almost 3,300 persons for military service, from the territory of the Crimean Peninsula. Most cynically, majority of them are expected to serve beyond the Crimean Peninsula, in Russian territory.

The neglect by the occupying state of the life and health of illegally detained Ukrainian citizens requires a firm international response. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on health security in prisons in Russia and temporarily occupied territories may be systemic, posing a serious threat to the health and life of illegally detained Ukrainian citizens. Russia deliberately ignores the calls of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture, for urgent measures to protect the health and safety of persons in detention. Russia ignores complaints about the poor health of prisoners, even in the presence of symptoms specific to COVID-19. It also continues, despite the quarantine measures, to move the detainees from Crimea to the territory of RF, and this is done in inhumane and degrading conditions.

The Ukrainian side demands that RF must fully guarantee the right to life and access to healthcare for illegally detained Ukrainians, provide full and comprehensive access for the monitoring missions, ICRC representatives, and doctors to the population in the temporarily occupied territories for qualified medical examination and treatment. We also reiterate our **demand to Russia** to provide us with comprehensive and regular **updates** on COVID-19 spread in the temporarily occupied territories as well as on measures, it takes to help the local population in this regard.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.