



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 1306th meeting of the Permanent Council
18 March 2021

Madam Chairperson,

At the meetings of the Permanent Council, we regularly hear a number of arguments by the Russian side, why it does not want to cease its armed aggression and to withdraw its troops from the sovereign territory of Ukraine.

Last week, for instance, we were told about existence of the so-called "people of Donbas" with their own, I quote the Russian delegation, "national-cultural identity", end of quote, and so-called "people of Crimea".

Such manipulations were very common in Moscow yet in the Soviet times, when Kremlin's ideologues tried to forge so-called "Soviet people", attempting to justify the crimes of totalitarian regime and to erase identities of national republics. The time has passed, but the ideas in Moscow remained the same. The Russian leaders do not accept the mere existence of a sovereign Ukrainian state.

I wish to stress that no one heard of such so-called "peoples of Donbas and Crimea" before February 2014, when Russia started its invasion into Ukraine. All of them are Ukrainian citizens, including Ukrainians, Russians, Crimean Tatars and many other ethnic communities, which have peacefully lived in harmony until Kremlin took the decision to intervene. There was no such "national-cultural identity", which could justify Russia's armed invasion into the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. In Crimea, the Crimean Tatar people were actively opposing the Russian occupation, not calling for it. They continue to pay the price for this opposition, suffering from illegal searches, detentions and long-term sentences.

We urge the Russian delegation to stop delivering false narratives, and to concentrate instead on implementing Russia's commitments under the Minsk agreements and N4 arrangements, as well as its obligations as an occupying Power in Crimea.

The extent of Russia's non-compliance with its obligations as regards Donbas is terrifying. Let me provide you with some data covering the period since the additional measures to strengthen ceasefire entered into force on 27 July 2020 and up to 10 March this year. All of them belong to the Russia-backed illegal armed formations:

- almost 900 shellings, including a hundred from the Minsk-proscribed weapons;
- 58 cases of use of UAVs;
- 25 cases of strengthening military positions;

- 21 case of remote planting of mines;
- 8 shellings of the residential areas.

The armed provocations by the Russian proxies left 16 Ukrainian militaries killed and 69 wounded. This can hardly be called a ceasefire. Sticking to it becomes more and more challenging.

These attacks continue: on 11 March, another UAV produced by the Russian company "ZALA AERO" was detected by the Ukrainian militaries; on 12 March, another Ukrainian serviceman was killed by sniper fire near Oleksandrivka. The most recent SMM weekly report of 16 March indicates two-fold increase of the ceasefire violations.

We strongly urge the Russian side to return to ceasefire instead of trying to shift blame for its non-compliance to Ukraine.

We also underline Russia's responsibility to ensure free, safe and unhindered access by the SMM to the entire territory of Ukraine. Such incidents, as was the case on 15 March near Olenivka, when an SMM patrol was denied exit to the government-controlled areas, are simply unacceptable. The SMM monitors are not Russia's hostages.

The same goes true for civilians. Last week, Special Representative Heidi Grau confirmed during the briefing for participating States that from technical point of view everything is ready in "Zolote" and "Shchastia" entry-exit checkpoints for them to be opened immediately for civilian crossings. This is fully in line with what we, along with other delegations, demand from the Russian side: open those EECs now, do not undermine even further the dire situation of civilians in the Russia-occupied parts of Donbas.

In this vein, let me draw attention of participating States to the most recent report by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on the human rights situation in Ukraine, covering the period from 1 August 2020 to 31 January 2021. It provides a long list of specific facts and data, which can not be ignored. Data, reported by the OHCHR, confirm in particular the findings by the Ukrainian side presented by the delegation of Ukraine to the PC meeting two weeks ago, for instance, on the drastically reduced number of religious communities, which survived the occupation of Crimea.

It is notable that the situation both in the occupied Crimea and in the occupied parts of Donbas, highlighted by the Report, is very similar. There are the same arbitrary arrests, human rights violations in relation to detention conditions, attacks on fundamental freedoms of opinion and expression, peaceful assembly and association, religion or belief and many others. The OHCHR also confirmed the OSCE SMM reports on introduction of Russian language as so-called "official language" in the occupied parts of Donbas.

The Russian occupation authorities act in a similar way in all temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, be it Crimea or parts of Donbas: they introduce Russia's authoritarian legislation, language, currency, tax system and many other elements of public administration aimed at integration of the occupied regions of Ukraine. We severely condemn this vicious and unlawful practice, which complicates future reintegration of those regions.

We, again, urge the Russian Federation to reverse its illegal occupation of Crimea, militarization of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, and to stop its aggression against Ukraine, including by withdrawing its armed formations, mercenaries and their hardware from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and fully implementing its commitments under the Minsk agreements.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.