



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 1325th meeting of the Permanent Council
22 July 2021

Madam Chairperson,

Today marks exactly one year since Ukraine and Russia, with mediation of the OSCE in the Trilateral Contact Group, reached an agreement regarding additional measures to strengthen the ceasefire in Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine.

We regret that the initial drastic reduction of ceasefire violations in the second half of 2020 did not turn into a sustainable and comprehensive peace. The SMM reports of the last weeks indicate that the level of armed hostilities along the line of contact has in fact reached the daily average of 2020.

The Russian armed formations continue shelling Ukrainian military positions and residential areas, taking lives and damaging infrastructure. The most recent shellings took place last week, as confirmed by the SMM, in the villages of Taramchuk and New York (formerly Novhorodske), by artillery and mortar rounds from an easterly direction.

The ceasefire, the first step in implementation of the security provisions of the Minsk agreements, was not followed by other security steps, such as withdrawal of heavy weapons and illegal armed formations, disengagement, and demining, due to various forms of blackmailing and procedural tricks by Russia in the TCG.

The last meeting of the TCG and its Working Groups on 20 and 21 July was again marked by persistent attempts by the Russian side to introduce the persons it had invited from Donetsk and Luhansk as a "full-fledged party to the conflict" and a "separate delegation to the TCG". It seems that imposition of the so-called "direct dialogue" with those persons, under any possible pretext, remains the only goal of Russia in the TCG, for which it is ready to sacrifice any progress in resolution of the conflict it had initiated seven years ago.

Even such critical humanitarian issues as release of conflict related detainees or demining are blocked by the Russian side until its demands are met. While Russia delays reaching arrangements on those issues, the number of victims continues to grow. So far in 2021, the SMM has confirmed 46 civilian casualties, including 12 fatalities, the majority of which, over 70 per cent, were caused by mines, unexploded ordnance and other explosive objects.

Thousands of civilians experience considerable difficulties while crossing the line of contact due to the restrictions imposed by the Russian armed formations. The SMM reports provide a comprehensive picture of such challenges.

I would remind the Russian side that it has undertaken specific commitments in this regard during the last Normandie Four summit in Paris. We urge Russia to stick to them. Special attention must be paid to the freedom of movement of the SMM. The Mission's patrols and technical assets must be allowed to operate in a safe and

secure manner in the parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine, temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation.

Russia's reluctance to implement the Minsk agreements and the arrangements reached within the N4 format is all too apparent, for instance, in its policy of illegal massive issuance of Russian passports to the citizens of Ukraine, so-called "passportization". We have already informed the Permanent Council that these actions are aimed, among others, at increasing electoral support of Russia's ruling party at the forthcoming parliamentary elections in September 2021.

Two days ago, on 20 July, the Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation adopted the decision to allow the owners of such passports to vote online. We urge the ODIHR and OSCE participating States to assess the consequences of this decision for the legitimacy of parliamentary elections in Russia in whole. This represents a very serious violation of Ukraine's sovereignty, and of the Minsk agreements that are aimed at restoring it in Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine. We also expect a clear reaction of the Chairpersonship to this flagrant violation of the OSCE core principles.

Full implementation of the Minsk agreements, even when reached, will not end the Russian-Ukrainian conflict alone. Restoration of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders will also require de-occupation by Russia of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol.

The current situation in the Crimean peninsula continues to be marked by two key trends, that is increasing militarization of it as an outpost of Russia's military presence in the wider Black Sea region, and the ongoing massive abuses of human rights and fundamental freedoms by the occupying Power, with a particular stress on Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians.

Russia's decision in 2014 to invade Ukraine and occupy Ukraine's Crimea was dictated by Kremlin's aggressive expansionist military ideas. Recently, a new radar station was announced to be built in the city of Sevastopol, which would cover Mediterranean Sea, Northern Africa and Central Atlantic. Russia tries to project its military power far away of its borders, threatening not only its neighbours, but a wider OSCE region as well.

Systematic persecutions of Crimean residents by the Russian occupation authorities remain particularly widespread for those who were falsely accused of alleged violations of Russia's anti-extremist legislation, which must not be used in the occupied territories according to the international humanitarian law. Illegal detentions are extended, medical assistance is denied, and those who were already released from detention, are forced to testify against other detained persons. Tortures remain a common practice.

On 15 July, the Russian occupiers filed trumped-up charges of possession and transport of explosives, a favourite pretext of the Russian special forces, against Ukrainian freelance journalist Vladyslav Yesypenko, who was earlier tortured to testify against himself. We demand the Russian side to immediately release him and dozens of other political prisoners in Crimea, as well as in the territory of the Russian Federation.

I would also remind participating States on our invitation to take part in the work of "Crimea Platform", the inaugural Summit of which will take place in one month, on 23 August, in Kyiv. Its comprehensive structure including governmental, parliamentary and expert dimensions, will allow participants to join its activities in every possible format.

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.