



**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 1309<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Permanent Council  
15 April 2021

**Madam Chairperson,**

The next day after the last regular meeting of the Permanent Council, on 26 March, the Russian armed formations killed 4 Ukrainian servicemen and wounded 2 of them. The fire took place from the water pumping station near Shumy, in which the Russian mercenaries established their military position, knowing that the Ukrainian militaries would not deliver a response fire to the object of critical civilian infrastructure supplying water to civilians.

That was not an isolated case: in March 2021 alone, similar attacks were made in 12 different locations. We strongly condemn Russia's vile and cynical tactics in Donbas, when local population is used as a human shield for inflicting losses, escalating situation on the ground and pressing Ukraine to accommodate Kremlin's political ends.

All the developments of the following two weeks were a clear demonstration of the fact that Russia took a deliberate stance to heighten tension and threaten Ukraine with the use of force.

We have already informed participating States on the large-scale military build-up of Russia in the territories adjacent to the state border of Ukraine and in the temporarily occupied Crimea in the last several days, including yesterday at the special joint PC-FSC meeting convened in accordance with the provisions of the Vienna Document 2011. Russia's assurances delivered during that meeting that its military activity should raise no concern were totally unconvincing.

Significantly increased Russia's military presence was accompanied by principled reluctance of Russia to engage into diplomatic and political contacts with the aim to de-escalate situation. On 29 March, at the N4 leaders' advisors meeting, Russia rejected a joint statement on ceasefire proposed by Ukraine. On 31 March, the Russian delegation in the TCG refused to reconfirm ceasefire in Donbas beginning from 1 April.

The TCG extraordinary meeting on 7 April did not bring any breakthrough: despite verbal reiterations of the commitment to the ceasefire regime, the Russian side again refused to endorse a statement to that effect. Today, we see the tragic result of this Russian stalling tactics: since 8 April, 4 Ukrainian servicemen were killed and 5 wounded.

Russia's military and political steps go hand in hand with its massive disinformation campaign, which has only strengthened in the recent days. Deaths of civilians in the temporarily occupied parts of Donbas due to explosion of mines

or other reasons are really unfortunate. We deplore all of them. Those are citizens of Ukraine, disregarding the fact on which side of the line of contact they live. But these cases were immediately falsely reported by the Russian occupation media as responsibility of the Ukrainian military, later reproduced by media in Russia itself and Russian officials. This was done even at the highest level, as was the case with Chairman of Russia's State Duma Viacheslav Volodin and a death of 5-years old child in Oleksandrivske.

Russia's propaganda blaming Ukraine for escalation of tensions on the ground completely contradicts the reality. I will quote some of the findings reported by the SMM, which speak for themselves. In the last three weeks, the Mission spotted 202 Minsk-proscribed heavy weapons, all of them but three in the parts of Donbas occupied by Russia. Similarly, out of 512 weapons outside designated storage sites, 82% were registered in the areas under Russia's control. The SMM has also spotted for the first time an extension to an existing trench of the Russian armed formations inside Zolote disengagement area, hundreds of new anti-tank mines, and dozens of anti-personnel mines in the occupied areas.

We remind the Russian side of its commitments undertaken pursuant to the Minsk agreements and within the "Normandie Format": on withdrawal of heavy weapons, disengagement, and demining. As reiterated many times before, the Russian representatives in the TCG persistently block any progress on new arrangements on disengagement and demining under completely artificial pretexts and without regard to their prior commitments, declarations and agreements reached.

The SMM would have been able to inform on even more violations of the Minsk agreements by Russia, if its monitors and assets had not been severely restricted by the Russian side.

We are grateful to the Secretary General for her today's remarks on a very challenging environment, in which the SMM was forced to work recently.

In the second half of 2020, as provided in the most recent SMM thematic report on restrictions to its freedom of movement, 93% of such restrictions took place in the Russia-occupied parts of Donbas. This year, the situation has not become better, especially in the last weeks when Russia began escalating situation on the ground. For instance, in one single day of 10 April, the SMM mini-UAVs were fired at three times during flights over positions of the Russian armed formations near the occupied villages of Spartak, Vesele and Betmanove. Overall last week, the SMM freedom of movement was restricted on 15 occasions, all of them in the occupied parts of Donbas.

We thank the SMM observers for their efforts to deliver monitoring even in this very challenging environment. In connection with the recent media reports on the forced conscription taking place in the occupied areas of the Donetsk region, I wish to address the Mission a request to verify this information. If confirmed, it would be another war crime perpetrated by the Russian Federation in the temporarily occupied parts of Ukraine. Earlier, the occupying Power has led this illegal activity violating international humanitarian law in Crimea. If the same became true for Donbas, that would only confirm Russia's intention to proceed to the military escalation against Ukraine.

Let me stress: Ukraine remains committed to the peaceful settlement of the conflict initiated, led and supported by Russia, in particular by reducing tensions caused by the recent unusual military activity by the Russian Federation along the border with Ukraine. Our intentions in this regard are clear and transparent. Our steps in the OSCE, including within the Vienna Document 2011, confirm this approach.

I would specifically mention the recent phone talks of Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba with Chairperson-in-Office Ann Linde on 3 April and Secretary General Helga Schmid on 1 April, dedicated to the issue of Russia's systematic aggravation of the security situation in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions and in Crimea. In both cases, special attention was paid to the opening of additional forward patrol bases along the uncontrolled section of the Ukrainian-Russian state border, which would enhance transparency and contribute to security and stability along the border.

I can only reiterate the words of Minister Kuleba that we critically need clear and strong diplomatic signals to demotivate Russia from any further destructive actions. We thank those participating States, who have already delivered such signals.

Last, but not the least, we must not forget about the fate of Ukrainian citizens illegally detained by the Russian occupation administrations in Crimea and Donbas. The Russian occupiers do not hesitate to use torture to force detained persons to incriminate themselves, as they (the occupation administrations) cannot present any meaningful evidences to support the false accusations. We strongly condemn this practice, demonstrated in particular by the case of Vladyslav Yesypenko, a freelance journalist captured in the occupied Crimea. We remind the Russian side of its own commitments, including the most recent one taken at the 27<sup>th</sup> Tirana OSCE Ministerial Council by adoption of the MC Decision on prevention and eradication of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

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.**