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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 1259th meeting of the Permanent Council,
13 February 2020

Mr. Chairperson,

Next Thursday, on 20 February, we will mark six years since the Russian Federation launched its armed aggression against sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine by sending its military units to occupy Ukraine's Crimea. A few weeks later, Russia started its hybrid warfare in Donbas, which continues until now. Faced with this attack, Ukraine has been trying to cease the conflict from its very first day. Following intensive military clashes with the Russian mercenaries in Donbas, the Ukrainian authorities agreed to sign with Russia, with mediation of the OSCE, the Minsk Protocol and Memorandum in September 2014. Implementing provisions of these documents, the Ukrainian side ceased fire, withdrew heavy weapons from the contact line, adopted the Law "On a Special Order of Local Self-Government in Certain Areas of Donetsk and Luhansk Regions" and called early local elections in those areas for December 2014 to let Ukrainian citizens in Donbas to elect their legitimate representatives. Everything was ready to restore peace in Donbas.

But that was never part of the plan of the Russian Federation. Instead of implementing its commitments under the Minsk documents signed in September 2014, it called its own fake and illegal "so-called" elections in the parts of Donbas it controlled, in November 2014, and installed occupation de-facto authorities, which did not intend to restore peace. Later on, Russia has severely intensified its military attacks in Donbas, seizing new territories, killing Ukrainian citizens, damaging infrastructure and threatening to expand its armed aggression to the entire Ukraine. In order to stop this bloodshed, on 12 February 2015, the Ukrainian side agreed to sign the Minsk Package of Measures, later endorsed by the UN Security Council Resolution 2202, which complemented the Minsk Protocol and Memorandum. It did not stop Russia as well. In the following days, it seized Debaltseve, a major railway hub between Donetsk and Luhansk, and continued regular armed attacks against the Ukrainian militaries.

This is a well-established pattern of behaviour of the Russian Federation: to create a problem, to take commitment to resolve it, then violate this commitment and to create another problem, to demand new concessions from the other side. Let me recall some of the most recent arrangements reached between Ukraine and Russia in Paris last December. Full and comprehensive implementation of the ceasefire has not been reached: the SMM reports indicate that the daily number of ceasefire

violations almost corresponds to 2019 daily average. Instead of demining, the Russian armed formations planted 23 banned anti-personnel mines, including three seen by the SMM for the first time, near the eastern edge of Petrivske disengagement area, less than 1km from a residential area of Petrivske. Opening of new crossing points remains stalled, including Zolote, ready to be opened from the government-controlled side for almost for four years for now. Safe and secure access of the SMM throughout Ukraine remains only on paper: in the last two weeks, the Mission reported 60 active restrictions of its freedom of movement, all but five in Russia-occupied parts of Donbas. Dozens of heavy weapons remain in violation of their respective withdrawal lines in those territories, including, I again refer to the SMM, a probable mortar (120mm) south-east of the south-eastern edge of Stanytsia Luhanska disengagement area, about 50m from the nearest residential house.

These were immediate measures to stabilize the situation in the conflict area, agreed in Paris. Without their fulfilment, we cannot proceed with the measures to implement the political provisions of the Minsk agreements, also agreed at that N4 Summit. There is a clear logic for this sequence: you cannot organize and hold democratic, fair and transparent elections without prior establishment of the necessary security environment.

Non-implementation by Russia of its obligations continues to take place in the occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol as well. Russia is an occupying Power in Crimea, which has to abide, in particular, by the norms of international humanitarian law. This has been recognized in particular by the UN GA Resolutions. Ukrainian citizens, Kremlin's political prisoners, are illegally held by the Russian occupation authorities behind bars in inappropriate conditions, without the necessary medical assistance and without contacts with their families. Fake trials, based on trumped-up charges, continue. On 10 February, in particular, illegal pretrial detention was prolonged for 10 Crimean Tatars, persecuted for assessed belonging to the religious organization, which is not banned in Ukraine.

We thank the OSCE SMM for its efforts to pay attention to the dire humanitarian situation in Crimea by talking to people who fled from the Russia-occupied peninsula, and observing situation at the entry-exit checkpoints between Kherson region and Crimea, to which Chief Monitor referred last week at the meeting of the Permanent Council. We encourage the Mission, as well as other OSCE assets to remain seized of this matter.

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 from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and fully implementing its commitments under the Minsk agreements.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.