



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International Organizations in Vienna

**Statement in response to H.E. Lamberto Zannier,
OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities**

As delivered by Ambassador Yevhenii Tsymbaliuk,
Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,
to the 1270th meeting of the Permanent Council,
4 June 2020

Mr. Chairperson,

The Delegation of Ukraine welcomes the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Ambassador Lamberto Zannier back to the Permanent Council.

We appreciate our close relationship and cooperation with the High Commissioner as well as his engagement in assisting Ukraine in developing language and education policies aimed at ensuring the rights of the persons belonging to national minorities and integration of the Ukraine's diverse society. Ukraine stays committed to further protecting and promoting the rights of all national minorities in Ukraine in line with OSCE commitments and international standards.

Ukraine is a country where over 130 national minorities are represented. They live in peace and harmony side by side over decades and centuries. This assessment on lack of interethnic strife is reflected in reports of international organizations. All forms of discrimination are illegal and prohibited by the law in Ukraine.

At the same time numerous significant challenges faced by Ukraine and its people today stem from direct aggression of the Russian Federation. The armed conflict unleashed by the Russian Federation in Donbas and the illegal occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol have considerable impact on the political climate and economic and social life of the country. This impact and its consequences cannot be overstated.

Notwithstanding the current Russian armed aggression against Ukraine, Ukrainian society continues to be tolerant and open, respectful of multiple identities of persons making up its population. The national minorities and linguistic and cultural diversity of Ukrainian population are considered as invaluable asset in my country.

Dear High Commissioner,

Reflecting upon your comments in the report regarding the recently adopted education and state language laws we wish once again to highlight that key goal of the national legislation is to provide equal opportunities for all Ukrainian citizens

despite of their origin to acquire a high level of state language proficiency while ensuring the constitutional right of each person to learn the mother tongue and chose mother tongue as language of education.

In this regard we commend the stance repeatedly expressed by the HCNM that “Ukraine has every right to strengthen the role of the State language to facilitate integration and to enhance a shared sense of belonging”. The recognition of this right by the international community is extremely important for Ukraine taking into account the decades or even centuries of subjugation by Russia, its constant attempts to assimilate Ukrainians and stifle their drive toward national self-identification. Let me just remind you that occupation administrations of certain regions of Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine have recently decided to deprive Ukrainian of a status of the state language on occupied territories and put Russian as a “state language”.

Regretfully these attempts have not been exhausted with the collapse of Soviet Union. Today most evidently these attempts could be traced in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol under the Russian illegal occupation, where the ethnic Ukrainians and Crimean Tatar national minority are subjected to the growing repressions, serious human rights violation and discrimination.

The occupying authorities deny Crimeans the right to receive education in their native languages. Due to the policy of the occupation authorities the number of pupils educated in Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar is constantly decreasing. As of the end of 2019, only 250 children were educated in Ukrainian and 6,000 in Crimean Tatar. There are recorded cases when the school administrations forced parents to refuse in writing from education for their children in any language other than Russian.

In 2019 the largest number of criminal cases against Crimean Tatars since the beginning of the occupation was recorded. About 100 citizens of Ukraine, most of them Crimean Tatars, are illegally detained or convicted by Russia for political reasons in the territory of the Russian Federation and temporarily occupied Crimea.

The number of violations of freedom of religion and the right to peaceful assembly has increased significantly in the course of the year. Russian border guards in occupied Crimea unreasonably detain activists that are crossing the administrative border between Crimea and mainland Ukraine and try to force Ukrainian citizens to agree to confidential cooperation with the Russian authorities. While the occupying authorities deny ethnic Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars the right to be educated in their native language, there is a distinct tendency toward militarization in the Crimean schools.

All these take place on the background of total negligence of the Order on provisional measures delivered by the International Court of Justice on 19 April 2017, concluding that the Russian Federation must “Refrain from maintaining or imposing limitations on the ability of the Crimean Tatar community to conserve its representative institutions, including the Mejlis“ and “Ensure the availability of education in the Ukrainian language”.

Dear High Commissioner,

Human rights defenders and international organizations, including the UN, claim that the Russian Federation has been trying to change the demographics of occupied Crimea by encouraging its own population to move to the peninsula. Since

the beginning of the occupation, about 500,000 Russians have moved to Crimea whereas at least 43,000 Crimeans have left the peninsula.

During one of the recent PC meetings we discussed the issue of forcefully military conscription of Crimea's residents in breach of international law. Taking this opportunity, we wish to hear the HCNM voice and unbiased assessments of these illegal policies with regard to the Ukrainian citizens on the occupied territories.

Regarding the occupied territories of Donbas we are deeply alarmed with the criminal activities of the Russia-backed illegal armed formations which led to internal displacement of over 1,4 million people and eradication of human rights and freedoms, including of national minorities, for the people who remained there.

Another area of our major concern is illegal "passportization" by the Russian Federation of the Ukrainian citizens in the temporarily occupied areas of the Donbas.

In this regards we encourage the HCNM to seek responses to the plight of the people, who reside on the occupied territories of Ukrainian Crimea and Donbas, in cooperation with the SMM which carries out monitoring activities in the area in accordance with its mandate.

Dear High Commissioner,

The Delegation of Ukraine is concerned with the lack of the regular HCNM reporting on the conditions of national minorities in the Russian Federation. We are alarmed over the repressive practices and discrimination by the Russian authorities against Ukrainian NGOs and activists, including closure of the only Library of Ukrainian Literature in Russia as well as ban of the activities of the Ukrainian World Congress on the territory of the Russian Federation under the national security pretext. These actions are driven by the campaign to incite anti-Ukrainian sentiments in that country and pose a serious threat to preserving and developing the national identity, cultural and linguistic needs of the Ukrainian community in Russia.

We again encourage the High Commissioner to give immediate attention to these worrying trends, to examine the situation in the country and take steps to urge the Russian Federation to fully comply with relevant OSCE commitments on national minorities.

In closing, Mr. Chairperson, taking into account remarks by the distinguished Hungarian Permanent Representative in the national capacity, let me assure that I will duly inform my capital about his statement. It was my understanding that a wide range of issues of cooperation between Ukraine and Hungary has been discussed during the meeting of our Foreign Ministers on 28-29 May 2020 in Budapest. We hope that our dialogue will be continued at the highest level soon. I believe that such bilateral dialogue will bring additional positive results.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.