



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International
Organizations in Vienna

Statement in response to the CiO Special Representative in Ukraine and the TCG Heidi Grau and the SMM Chief Monitor Yaşar Halit Çevik

As delivered by Ambassador Yevhenii Tsymbaliuk,
Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,
to the 1264th meeting of the Permanent Council,
23 April 2020

Mr. Chairperson,

We join other delegations in welcoming Special Representative Heidi Grau and Chief Monitor Halit Çevik back to the Permanent Council. We thank the Albanian Chairmanship for inviting both speakers to present their reports. Regretfully, we are in the middle of a major world crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, we must not forget about the ongoing aggression of one participating State against another one. Russia's armed attack against Ukraine continues to take lives, wellbeing and future of Ukrainian citizens.

Let me express gratitude to **Ambassador Grau** for her mediation efforts to facilitate negotiations between Ukraine and Russia within the Trilateral Contact Group. The most recent mutual release of the conflict-related detainees last Thursday became the only bright spot in the last few months. Twenty Ukrainian citizens were set free from the parts of Donbas, temporarily occupied by Russia. We encourage Special Representative and the entire team of Albanian Chairmanship to keep a particular focus on this issue. Negotiations must continue without any interruption, as was the case yesterday, on 22 April, in the online format. We urge the Russian side to release all Ukrainian political prisoners, illegally held behind bars in the occupied parts of Ukraine and in the territory of the Russian Federation.

We encourage the TCG to proceed with establishment of additional disengagement areas and new crossing points, in accordance with the Normandy Four agreed conclusions. When the time comes to reopen crossing of the contact line in Donbas, everything must be ready to facilitate this process for civilians. The COVID-19 pandemic should also not serve as an excuse for the Russian side to prevent the access of the ICRC, as well as other international bodies, to the persons detained by the Russian armed formations in Donbas. I would remind that the Government of Ukraine made a duly exception for the representatives of the monitoring and human rights missions, including the SMM and the ICRC. They enjoy the right to cross the contact line in accordance with the earlier established procedures.

We continue to stress the importance of return of control of the Ukrainian-Russian border to the Government of Ukraine. This will serve as a good basis to stop violence in Donbas, brought by Russia. As reiterated recently by President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the local elections in Donbas will take place after withdrawal of the illegal armed formations and return of the border. We reiterate in this context the necessity of establishment of an additional Working Group within the TCG.

Chief Monitor, we understand the challenging circumstances, under which the SMM currently works. Safety and security of the monitors are a top priority. Today, we mark a sad anniversary of the tragic incident, which took place three years ago near the Russia-occupied village of Pryshyb. We pay tribute to the memory of the US paramedic Joseph Stone, who lost his life in the line of duty. We took note of the measures undertaken recently by the Mission due to the outbreak of COVID-19 and challenges related to it. Let me assure you, that the Government of Ukraine will continue to fully support the SMM in its activities. We remain interested in seeing the facts established by the Mission. As Russia's military invasion and occupation continues, the international community should keep its eyes and ears on the ground.

The report, provided by the SMM, states a deterioration of the security situation in Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine. The overall daily average of ceasefire violations was 14 per cent higher. The Minsk-proscribed heavy weapons were used seven times more often compared with the previous reporting period. The number of civilian casualties has grown from seven to 24, including three fatalities. Properties and infrastructure objects were damaged on 19 different occasions, compared only to three before. Anti-personnel mines, banned in Ukraine but not in Russia, continue to be registered by the SMM in Russia-occupied parts of Donbas. Russia's electronic warfare systems remain a serious threat for the SMM UAVs.

Moreover, these numbers do not provide a comprehensive picture of the dire situation in the conflict-affected areas. Since 21 March, the members of the Russian armed formations continue to restrict the SMM passage at checkpoints in both Donetsk and Luhansk regions along official crossing routes. We fully share the SMM's position that these restrictions constitute an impediment to the implementation of the Mission's mandate, and their continuation represents its violation. We support the practice of releasing regular spot reports on this unacceptable situation. We severely condemn Russia's decision to deny the SMM possibility to cross the contact line along official crossing routes. We urge the Russian side to lift these restrictions immediately and not to use the COVID-19 pandemic for its political gains. Moreover, they add up to the already existing ones: the SMM report states twofold (308 to 152) increase of its freedom of movement restrictions, all but 12 times in Russia-occupied areas.

We thank you, Ambassador Çevik, for paying particular attention to monitoring of areas, adjacent to the border not controlled by the government, as a "standing operational activity of high priority for the SMM". The facts, established by the Mission, which confirm Russia's ongoing illegal crossings of the border near Cheremshyne, Kosharne and Ulianivske, constitute important findings. We continue to support the SMM's plans "to expand its presence near border areas outside government control". Enhancing transparency at the border remains

an essential step towards return of control of the Ukrainian-Russian border to the Government of Ukraine, to which I referred earlier in my statement.

In the recent weeks, we observed a number of disturbing developments in the Crimean peninsula, temporarily occupied by Russia. The most provocative were a ban, introduced on coast land ownership for Ukrainian citizens, who will now lose their land plots legitimately obtained before occupation, and another illegal conscription to military service constituting a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law. We remind the SMM that its mandate covers entire territory of Ukraine, including the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. We thank the Mission for monitoring the checkpoints between Kherson region and the Crimean peninsula. At the same time, we remain convinced that is not enough. The SMM must join other OSCE structures highlighting the situation in Crimea, as was the case with the recent RFOM report to the UNESCO. We reiterate our call to the SMM to conduct a remote human rights monitoring in Crimea, using in particular the methodology provided by the UN.

The situation in the Azov and Black Sea region, its militarization and impediment of shipping, remains of outmost priority for Ukraine. We are aware of persistent denials of access for the SMM to the areas along the coast of the Sea of Azov, imposed by the Russian armed formations, to which the Mission also referred in its report presented today. We encourage the SMM to use its resources instead to maintain contacts with the local authorities in government-controlled areas of the coast of the Sea of Azov. Findings of the Mission would be useful to inform participating States on the dire social and economic consequences of Russia-introduced illegal impediments to the freedom of navigation in the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait.

Last, but not the least, let me thank the SMM for responding to our calls to pay more attention to the violations of Ukraine's sovereignty in Russia-occupied parts of Donbas. We encourage the Mission to continue following up on the reports, according to which the Russian proxies established Russian as the only so-called "official language" in those areas. We also remind on our previous calls to verify similar reports on Russian currency, tax system and legislation imposed by the Russian occupation authorities.

Let me close my statement by thanking again Ambassador Grau and Ambassador Çevik, as well as the entire SMM team, for their hard and dedicated work of contributing to peaceful resolution of the conflict, started by Russia, as well as to upholding the OSCE principles and commitments.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.