



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 1351st meeting of the Permanent Council

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Mr. Chairperson,

I would like to start by thanking delegations of the participating States.

The first meeting of the Permanent Council last week displayed our unwavering solidarity and unity in rejecting Russia's demand for the veto on a right of sovereign states to choose their future as well as in calling Moscow to end its aggression against neighbouring countries, including Ukraine. That would be the best security guarantee for Europe's future, stability, and prosperity.

Attempts to re-create zones of influence show that Russia's revisionism remains the key challenge to the European security order and underline the need for resolute actions in defending Helsinki Decalogue. This very resolve has already helped to transform general political discourse in Europe from confrontation to cooperation in the past and it should serve the same purpose nowadays.

Russia's manipulative denials of new plans to invade Ukraine will not change the reality – Russia has already occupied parts of Ukraine's Donbas and Crimea in 2014, when Ukraine was neutral in letter and spirit. Neutrality is the right of a state, which Russia had committed to but nevertheless violated. So, our further common actions are needed to restore respect for internationally recognized borders of Ukraine, including the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol.

As Russia propagates selectivity in respecting OSCE principles and questions our common obligation to defend them, let me refer to the Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security, which says that "[participating States] will consult promptly, in conformity with their CSCE responsibilities, with a participating State seeking assistance in realizing its individual or collective self-defence. They will consider jointly the nature of the threat and actions that may be required in defence of their common values".

That said, strong political messages and further practical steps are needed to prevent new aggressive acts, including false flag operations, by Russia, which continues reinforcing its forces both - along Ukraine's borders and in the temporarily occupied territory of Ukraine.

Ukraine poses no threat to the Russian Federation in contrast to Russia's maneuvers. There is no any justified reason for keeping more than 106 000 regular and well-trained troops, 1500 tanks, 3600 armoured combat vehicles, over 2000 artillery, while according to reports unknown number of units are being re-deployed from the Far East regions of this country and new joint military exercises being announced close to the northern border of Ukraine.

It amounts to the threat to use force, which is effectively forbidden under international law, including the UN Charter and the Helsinki Decalogue, does it not?

In the meantime, Russia continues bringing units in the occupied areas to a higher level of combat readiness.

As for the report from 14 of January the SMM spotted 35 multiple launch rocket systems, seven tanks and four self-propelled howitzers as well as 30 tanks, 11 howitzers, six surface-to-air-missile systems and three anti-tank guns.

According to the report from 15 January, the SMM spotted 26 howitzers in a training area near Buhaivka and seven tanks in a training area near Novoselivka as well as three surface-to-air missile systems, 50 tanks, 15 self-propelled artillery pieces and ten towed artillery pieces were located in training areas near Ternove, Miusynsk and six towed artillery pieces in a compound near Sadovyi.

We all know Russia's traditional reply that they are not there. But let me remind, in December last year, even the Russian court said that Russian military units were stationed in certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions on a permanent basis.

However, the military preparation is not the only realm we have to keep close eye on. Over the last week, we witnessed a massive cyberattack on government websites. The investigation is still ongoing but the Security Service of Ukraine has obtained preliminary indicators suggesting that hacker groups associated with the Russian secret services may stand behind this intrusion. The type of malicious software and consequences of the attack indicate that its goal was destabilization of government structures.

Russia often uses Ukraine as a testing ground for its new hybrid tools to be used elsewhere, so the threat of cyber-warfare should be seriously discussed by the participating States.

Excellencies,

Confrontation it is not what Ukraine stands for.

As Minister Kuleba said earlier: "Ukraine has never planned and does not plan to launch offensive military operations in Donbas. On the contrary, with France and Germany as mediators, we have spent 2021 seeking political and diplomatic solutions based on the Minsk agreements".

We expect Russia to follow the same logic and choose a constructive and result-oriented dialogue instead of the confrontation and sabre-rattling.

We call upon the Russian Federation, as party to the conflict and signatory of the Minsk agreements, to use pre-announced contacts within the Normandy Four format as well as next week TCG meeting in order to de-escalate the situation.

Opening new EECs in Zolote and Schastia on the non-government-control side of the line of contact as well as on making all other EECs fully operational would be an important step forward. 95 per cent decrease in the number of crossings of the contact line demands some urgent steps to improve the situation allowing people to get access to the basic services and benefits.

Mutual release of conflict related detainees, granting unimpeded access for the ICRC to the detention facilities in the occupied part of Donbas, finalization of demining plans are also long overdue.

Intensified attempts to link activities of the SMM with a political agenda are utterly unacceptable. The mandate of the SMM must be fully respected without any conditionality and the monitors must enjoy safe access throughout the territory of Ukraine as well as full support by the participating States in meeting their technical, financial and human needs in order to enable comprehensive monitoring.

Amassing Russia's troops on the border with Ukraine also underlines the need to fully unleash untapped potential of the OSCE toolbox related to military transparency.

A further dialogue on the matter is needed. The launch of the OSCE SMM permanent monitoring of the border areas as foreseen by the Minsk agreements should be among the steps that would contribute to confidence building within the Organization.

The fact that five of our servicemen lost their lives on the line of contact in Donbas since 22 December and new increase in ceasefire violations, as indicated in the latest weekly, prove how fragile the situation is and underlines urgency of the implementation of all security provisions of the Minsk agreements in order to ensure lasting and sustainable ceasefire regime. Security is a basis for progress on all other tracks.

In parallel, Russia's decisions that forcibly cut people in the occupied areas from Ukraine and impede the implementation of the Minsk agreements, including their political provisions, must be reversed. This includes passportization with more than 600 thousand passports already illegally issued, the use of Russian currency, economic measures and other acts aimed at incorporating the occupied areas into the Russian political and economic space. This is to be asked when the Russian side is again vilifying Ukraine about not implementing the Minsk agreements.

Excellencies,

The situation in Crimea continues demanding our special attention.

Russia in violation of its duties as occupying Power applies its national penal law to prosecute the residents of the occupied peninsula.

As First Deputy Head of Crimean Tatar Mejlis Nariman Dzhelyal wrote in a recent letter about his case that "most of the materials and the case itself is a lie. And this lie aims at silencing and intimidating as well as at allowing to continue the repression".

Just a few examples how repressive machine works in Crimea. On 13 January, the occupation court upheld the sentence against Jehovah's Witness Ihor Schmidt. In October he was sentenced for 6 years in prison.

A few days ago, the appeal against the detention of Vladyslav Yesypenko was once again rejected by so-called court in Crimea.

On 17 January, a Russian prosecutor asked for 18 years in prison for journalist Remzi Bekirov, 18.5 years for human rights activist Riza Izetov and activist Shaban Umerov, 16 years for activist Farkhod Bazarov and 18 years for activist Raim Aivazov.

This illegal case is considered by the Southern District Military Court in the territory of the Russian Federation which is also a violation of international humanitarian law.

Against this grim backdrop, we welcome that the European Federation of Journalist has recently updated its list of journalists in jail. The list now includes names of Vladyslav Yesypenko, Amet Suleymanov, Asan Akhtemov, Remzi Bekirov, Osman Arifmetov, Rustem Sheikhaliev, Marlen Asanov, Ruslan Suleymanov, Seyran Saliev, Server Mustafayev, Timur Ibragimov.

As I repeated on numerous occasions, our public attention would save their lives. That said we believe that further engagement of OSCE's autonomous institutions should significantly contribute to addressing human rights violations in the occupied Crimea.

To conclude, we again urge the Russian Federation to stop its aggression against Ukraine, reverse its illegal occupation of Crimea, de-occupy certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, and restore freedom of navigation in the Black Sea, through the Kerch Strait and in the Sea of Azov. Russia must fully implement its commitments under the Minsk agreements and agreements within the Normandy format, including the withdrawal of its armed forces, mercenaries, armed formations, and weapons from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.