



**Permanent Mission of Ukraine**  
to the International  
Organizations in Vienna

PC.DEL/209/19

1 March 2019

ENGLISH only

## **Five years of illegal occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol by the Russian Federation**

As delivered by Ambassador Ihor Prokopchuk,  
Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,  
to the 1218<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Permanent Council,  
28 February 2019

**Mr. Chairperson,**

Last week's Wednesday, 20 February 2019, marked the fifth anniversary of the start of Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine. Launching the aggression the Russian military units temporarily stationed in the Crimean peninsula under the respective Black Sea fleet agreements with Ukraine were reinforced by the notorious occupation forces sent by air and sea from the territory of the Russian Federation. They seized administrative buildings and key infrastructure facilities, Ukrainian military, police and border guard compounds and bases. With full military control over the Crimean peninsula, Kremlin proceeded with conduct of a shameful farce of so-called "people's referendum" under the barrels of Russian guns, intended to provide a false legitimacy to occupation and attempted annexation. After the barrage of denials of Russia's direct military role, one year later the Russian President publicly admitted the deployment and use of regular Russian troops for the purpose of illegal occupation of Ukraine's Crimea.

Russia's attempt to redraw the internationally recognised borders by force has become a fundamental challenge to the post-war security order in Europe, as the core norms of international law and the founding OSCE principles, including with regard to the inviolability of frontiers and respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states, had been flagrantly violated. Russia's actions have demonstrated a glaring disregard for bilateral and multilateral treaties and agreements, resulting in uncertainty over further intentions of Kremlin's revisionist regime. Russia's breach of the Budapest Memorandum on security assurances to Ukraine has significantly undermined the international efforts of non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

**Mr. Chairperson,**

One of the most serious security challenges stemming from the Russian invasion and occupation of the Crimean peninsula is its rapid transformation into a huge military base threatening security and stability in the entire Black Sea region. Its

scaled-up land, air and naval components have altered the security balance in the Black Sea, the Sea of Azov and a wider region covering Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East. Comparing to the pre-occupation period, the Russian Federation has almost tripled the strength of its military personnel in the peninsula, from 12 to 32 thousand persons, accompanied with sharp increase of capabilities and fire power. Infrastructure for nuclear weapons has been restored and modernized, which causes serious concerns in view of Russia's violation of obligations under the INF Treaty. Ukrainian citizens residing in the occupied Crimea and Sevastopol, who previously worked in the tourism sector in a peaceful environment, were forced into the Russian citizenship and are now subjected to compulsory military conscription by the Russian Federation, contrary to the obligations of the occupying State under international law. Under the pretext of protecting the illegally constructed Kerch bridge, Kremlin has multiplied its military presence in the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait and resorted to disruption of free navigation. Severe negative socio-economic impact on Ukrainian ports of Mariupol and Berdiansk of such Russia's illegal actions were confirmed by the OSCE SMM.

Russia's readiness to use its military force in the Sea of Azov became clear on 25 November 2018, when it again committed an open and deliberate act of armed aggression by attacking three Ukrainian naval vessels in international waters and seizing 24 Ukrainian servicemen. The sailors until now remain in Russia's captivity as prisoners of war. We should not underestimate Kremlin's unpredictable military intentions and the gravest security challenges stemming from its deliberate and continuing militarization of the occupied Crimean peninsula and the waters of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. The combination of politico-diplomatic pressure, economic and personal sanctions, and multilateral cooperation in the security field is urgently necessary to contain this threat. The OSCE, as the regional security Organisation, must play its indispensable role in this process.

**Mr. Chairperson,**

Russia's illegal occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol has led to gross and systematic violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms, directed mostly at ethnic Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars who are most vocal in their opposition to the foreign occupation. The plight of the people in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine was, in particular, in a spotlight of the UN GA debate held in New York last Wednesday. As President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko emphasised in his statement during this debate, "murder, torture, harassment, sexual violence, arbitrary detentions and arrests, enforced disappearances and persecution of journalists, human rights defenders, social media workers and bloggers have become a daily reality for the residents of the occupied territories".

A detailed picture of these violations was provided by representatives of Ukrainian and Russian NGOs two days ago at a side-event in Hofburg. Their observations are consistent with numerous other reports of civil society organizations and testimonies of human rights defenders, as well as the reports of international organisations, most notably by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. The deliberate character of Russia's persecutions of Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars, including closure of their schools, organisations and independent media became clear

to the International Court of Justice. In April 2017, it ordered, in Ukraine's case against Russia under the Convention on the Eradication of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, that the Russian Federation must, in accordance with its obligations under the Convention, to refrain from maintaining or imposing limitations on the ability of the Crimean Tatar community to conserve its representative institutions, including the Mejlis, and to ensure the availability of education in the Ukrainian language. This order by the Court remains ignored by the Russian Federation, just as it ignores many documents and resolutions adopted by the international organisations.

**Distinguished colleagues,**

The Russian Federation remains in clear, gross and continuing violations of OSCE principles and commitments, including of all ten principles of the Helsinki Final Act. Russia's revisionism and territorial expansionism, disregard for human rights and freedoms, including in the illegally occupied territories, constitute the biggest threat to collective security in the OSCE space. This threat can only be addressed by a consolidated action of the international community, including a strong and effective non-recognition policy, sanctions regime and the use of all available OSCE mechanisms and assets. It is important to upgrade distance monitoring of the situation in Crimea by the SMM as well as the OSCE autonomous Institutions. We encourage the leadership of the Slovak Chairmanship in alleviating the plight of the people under Russia's illegal occupation and in putting an end to massive abuses of human rights and fundamental freedoms by the occupation authorities.

Ukraine strongly condemns Russia's aggression, illegal occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol and numerous gross human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law in the occupied territory. We urge Russia to reverse the illegal occupation and to return the Crimean peninsula to Ukraine where it belongs according to norms of international law.

**Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.**