



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International
Organizations in Vienna

STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF UKRAINE

90th Joint FSC-PC Meeting

(21 February 2024)

Agenda Item 1, Security Dialogue: “On Security and Environment”

Chairs,

Ukraine aligns itself with the statement by the European Union. In addition, I would like to make some comments in my national capacity.

We are grateful to the OSCE Chairpersonship-in-Office of Malta and the FSC Chairpersonship of Cyprus for organising a joint FSC-PC meeting dedicated to the interconnection between security and the environment. We also thank all the speakers for their thought-provoking presentations and valuable contributions to the discussion.

Yesterday, 20 February, marked 10 years since the beginning of the occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol by the Russian Federation. On that day in 2014, armed people without insignia, later acknowledged by president Putin as representatives of Russian armed forces, started seizing administrative buildings in Ukrainian Crimea and attacking civil activists who tried to prevent that.

This act of aggression in Crimea was a prelude to Russia's invasion of Donbas in the Spring of 2014, which later, in February 2022, escalated into a full-scale war of aggression. As we approach the second anniversary of the invasion in just three days, it is crucial to acknowledge that consequences of this invasion have been profound.

Russia's illegal and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine has not only drastically worsened the security situation in the region, but also had a devastating environmental impact on Ukraine and surrounding areas, which has both immediate and long-term consequences for human health and the ecosystem of the entire region.

Esteemed colleagues,

Due to the ongoing hostilities, the full extent of environmental damage is still difficult to assess. However, even the preliminary estimates are staggering.

The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Ukraine has already recorded more than 3,800 cases of environmental damage. According to the available estimates the total cost of documented damages inflicted upon Ukraine due to the full-scale invasion by Russia amounts to 57 billion US dollars. These figures also include the damage due to the explosion of the Kakhovka dam in June 2023 which is one of the most significant ecological crimes committed by the Russian troops.

As a direct result of Russia's war, Ukraine continues to face high ecological risks concerning air, water and soil contamination. Hazardous substances contained in shells, mines, missiles and rockets create a toxic legacy for generations to come.

Since the start of the full-scale war in 2022, about 25% of Ukraine's protected areas have been occupied. This includes about 900 protected sites, 14 of them wetlands of international importance. Such territories suffer from inadequate protection and altered statuses. Forest fires caused by the regular shelling of Ukrainian territories continue to harm people and destroy the flora and fauna of Ukraine.

Numerous credible ecological organisations regularly warn about serious risks from the ongoing hostilities for the protection of endangered species. As was estimated, the destruction of the Kakhovka dam alone affected up to 20,000 wild animals, including endemic species.

It is also important to consider the illegal economic activities that the Russian Federation conducted in the occupied territories of Ukraine. Uncontrolled extraction of mineral resources, deforestation and implementation of illegal infrastructure projects, in particular, those aimed at the militarisation of the Crimean Peninsula such as the infamous so-called "Kerch Bridge", constitute a substantial interference in the biosystems and pose a serious risk for their proper functioning.

As the war is still ongoing and Russia's ecocide increases, detrimental environmental effects for the entire region will only further accumulate. Against this backdrop, it is particularly important to ensure that the aggressor state will not avoid the strictest responsibility for its atrocities.

The OSCE plays a significant role in this regard and its proper engagement plays an important role, in particular through the Office of the Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA).

By launching such a timely project titled “Assessment of environmental impacts of the war against Ukraine and options for remediation”, the OCEEA highlighted that the OSCE can contribute to addressing and mitigating the aftermaths of the Russian invasion on the ground. The first 12-month assessment review report has already been shared with our responsible authorities, so they can use it in a very practical way in the course of the future post-war recovery.

Ukraine is looking forward to further activities in the framework of the mentioned project and we are grateful to all our partners (Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Poland, the UK and the US) who supported this project. We are convinced that presenting the findings of the assessment review to the OSCE participating States will not only demonstrate the scale of the environmental damage caused by the aggressor state, but also confirm the deep connection between the environment and security.

The no less important are discussions that have already become regular within the framework of the politico-military dimension. As was rightly underlined in the concept note to today`s meeting, since the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, the protection of the environment has been an integral component of the OSCE comprehensive approach to security. From this perspective, our discussions on security and environment in the politico-military dimension are of paramount importance and the Delegation of Ukraine encourages future FSC chairpersonships to continue this well-established practice.

Chairs,

The topic of today`s Security Dialogue underlines the fact that the consequences of Russia`s war of aggression go far beyond Ukraine. They cannot be stopped by the state borders. Both immediate and long-term negative implications of military actions affect the entire region.

Regrettably, we see that Moscow adopted ecocide as one of the tools for its scorched-earth tactics aimed at the destruction of Ukraine as a state. Such actions cannot be tolerated. The aggressor state must be held accountable for that.

Thank you, Chairs.