



**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 1276<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Permanent Council,  
23 July 2020

**Mr. Chairperson,**

Russia carries on its relentless armed aggression against Ukraine, and hostilities in Donbas continue unabated. Last week, according to the SMM data, the number of ceasefire violations, including with the use of Minsk-proscribed weapons, increased more than twofold. In the same period, 21 Ukrainian soldiers were wounded and 3 killed in action, including military medic and serviceman ambushed by the Russian armed formations near Zaitseve while evacuating the body of another Ukrainian soldier after receiving security guarantees.

The violence in Donbas is complemented by the permanent threat of further wide-scale military escalation by the Russian leadership. Last Friday, on 17 July, President Putin ordered snap military exercises involving 150.000 personnel and hundreds of aircraft and naval vessels belonging to Russia's Southern and Western military districts, adjacent to Ukraine.

The Russian side persistently refuses to implement its own security commitments under the Minsk agreements, insisting on a (*quote-unquote*) "direct dialogue" with its occupation administration and on immediate introduction of a permanent special status for the parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine it has occupied. Statements delivered by the Russian delegation to the Permanent Council over the past few weeks are a clear illustration of this unconstructive approach. Let me reiterate: this blackmail will not work, and Russia's attempts to persuade the international community that there are no Russian troops, weapons or mercenaries in Ukraine, will not deceive anyone.

At the same time, while publicly demanding full implementation of all political provisions of the Minsk agreements, Russia and its representatives from the temporarily occupied areas continue blocking any headway on the political track of the Minsk talks.

Discussions within the TCG on regulations concerning the special order of local self-government in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine, including Ukrainian proposals on incorporation of the “Steinmeier formula” into the Ukrainian legislation, have virtually come to a standstill. Repeated attempts of the OSCE mediators to return to the practical work on respective provisions were not heeded.

On the humanitarian track, despite the clear understanding reached under the OSCE mediation on exchanging lists with names of detainees – according to set categories – for potential mutual release, the respective move by the Ukrainian side has not been reciprocated within the agreed timeframe, and no progress is currently in sight.

On the security track, we welcome the yesterday’s TCG’s agreement on additional measures to consolidate the ceasefire regime, starting from 00:01 hrs on 27 July. Ukraine is fully committed to implementing the agreed measures and expects that the Russian side will comply with the undertaken commitments. Yet, we cannot express similar optimism regarding other security measures now negotiated within the TCG, including disengagement of troops and hardware, as well as withdrawal of heavy weapons and demining. On this latter issue, what is particularly disturbing is that the Russian side refuses to approve the already agreed 13 areas for demining and allow sappers to start their important work during this summer period.

The Russian side continues to ignore the needs of the local population residing in the temporarily occupied parts of Donbas and Crimea. The crossings of the contact line by civilians remain severely restricted by the Russian armed formations.

In the Donetsk region, as reported by the SMM, the checkpoints of the armed formations are open only on certain days, and people are allowed to cross into the Russia-occupied areas only after being included into some lists. On the night of 16–17 July, 18 people had been stranded between the EECF and the corresponding checkpoint overnight and had spent the night in inflatable tents. At the same time, thousands of entries/exits are registered daily by the Border Observer Mission at the uncontrolled segment of the Ukrainian-Russian state border, which, as noted by many delegations in this hall, raises the question as to Russia’s motivation to restrict movements across the contact line under the pretext of preventing the spread of COVID-19.

We took note of the fact that the Russian armed formations have finally allowed the SMM to send several monitors into the occupied parts of Donetsk region to resume monitoring activities. This was long overdue. We urge the Russian side to lift all restrictions on the SMM activities, including in the areas adjacent to the uncontrolled segment of the border, and to ensure free, safe and unimpeded crossings of the contact line in line with the SMM mandate.

At the last PC meeting, the delegation of Ukraine, along with many others, highlighted the findings presented in the recent interim report by the UN Secretary-General on the “Situation of human rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine”. The facts, established by the UN Mission, are generally consistent with and complement the data gathered by independent Ukrainian NGOs on the situation in Crimea.

Let me draw your attention in this regard to the monitoring review prepared by the “Crimean Human Rights Group” for June 2020. According to it, as of end of June 2020, 98 persons were deprived of liberty within a politically motivated criminal or religious persecution undertaken in Crimea.

91 administrative proceedings are held in relation to religious organizations and their members. The number of Ukrainian radio stations reachable in Crimea continues to decline, as the Russian occupation authorities block them by broadcasting their own stations on the same wavelength.

In June only, 12 new criminal cases were opened against Crimean residents under the charges of evading the military service in the Russian Armed Forces, which, I remind again to the Russian delegation, constitutes a violation of international humanitarian law.

On 20 July, President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin paid another uncoordinated visit to Crimea, during which he took part in the ceremony of keel-laying of military vessels to be built in the occupied peninsula.

Not only is Ukraine’s sovereignty flagrantly violated by Russia, but the overall security of the Black Sea region is undermined by Russia’s ongoing militarization. As we have emphasised many times before, this represents a serious security challenge for the entire OSCE community. This topic deserves to be widely discussed within the Organization.

We reject the calls to limit discussions in the OSCE and its structures only to the so-called “consensual” issues, convenient for an aggressor State.

This situation requires appropriate response by the international community. In its statement adopted on 17 July on the illegitimate nationwide vote on amendments to the Constitution of the Russian Federation on the temporarily occupied territory of Ukraine – the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (Ukrainian Parliament) called on the democratic countries of the world to continue and strengthen international political and economic pressure on Russia with the aim of restoration of sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders including Crimea and Sevastopol.

We call on the OSCE participating States to remain proactively seized of these matters. On 21 July, during a press-conference on the topic “Lack of freedom of speech in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine”, Ukrainian journalist Stanislav Aseiev, released last year from illegal detention in Donetsk, said that it was the attention of the international community and Ukrainian civil society that, in fact, saved his life and contributed to his release, unlike other journalists and bloggers who were detained together with him.

During the event, the MFA of Ukraine launched a project to support professional journalists – victims of oppression and torture in the occupied areas of Donbas and Crimea. As was stressed, only publicity and public disclosure of the stories of imprisoned journalists can save them from torture and help defend their rights in courts.

We, again, urge the Russian Federation to reverse its illegal occupation of Crimea, militarization of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, and stop its military aggression against Ukraine, including by withdrawing its armed formations,

mercenaries and their hardware from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and fully implementing its commitments under the Minsk agreements.

**Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.**