



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 1352nd meeting of the Permanent Council
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Mr. Chairperson,

Yesterday the European Court on Human Rights in Strasbourg started hearing in case concerning Russia and events in Donbas.

Just a year ago this very Court accepted Ukraine's arguments and took a preliminary decision concerning Crimea that debunked Russia's myths about the event on the peninsula in 2014 and was another important step forward in restoring respect for the rule of law, security and human rights in Europe.

This time, according to the Minister of Justice, Ukraine has brought to Strasbourg documented evidences proving Russia's responsibilities for atrocities in Donbas, including facts of crossing of border by the Russian armed forces, shelling of Ukrainian territory from the territory of the Russian Federation, supplies of the Russian weaponry and ammunition, testimonies of prisoners of the Izolyatsia prison.

The consideration of Donbas case is extremely timely and right to point, as the last months have clearly demonstrated that Russia has taken a deliberate stance to heighten tension and threaten Ukraine and its people once again with the use of force.

I want to repeat it once again – there are over 106 000 regular and well-trained troops, 1500 tanks, 3600 armoured combat vehicles, over 2000 artillery systems on the Ukrainian eastern border. They are stationed there without any justified reason. Furthermore, an intention to conduct new military drills close to the northern border of Ukraine is also concerning, while fighters SU-35 are being redeployed. And we call to provide necessary transparency about the exercise, including through voluntary briefings.

Apart from that, Russia continues to enhance combat and attack capabilities of its forces in the occupied territories. Yesterday's suggestion by the Russian ruling party "United Russia" to supply officially military equipment and ammunition to the occupied territories just proves what we all have known long ago – such supplies have never stopped.

According to the report of 20 January, the SMM spotted 24 tanks, including ten probable, ten self-propelled howitzers and 12 towed artillery pieces in training areas near Ternove and Myrne. The presence of 51 armoured combat vehicles was also revealed there.

On 21 January, 22 multiple launch rocket system Grad were spotted by the SMM near Khrustalnyi, 56km southwest of Luhansk. . Apart from that, the Ukrainian Security Service reported this week about new facts of the use Russian-produced rocket-propelled flame thrower 'Shmel' and anti-personnel mines forbidden under the Ottawa convention.

Shelling is also of particular concern. According to the latest SMM weekly, of the total 1452 ceasefire violations, 67 were assessed as live-fire exercises outside the security zone, all in Russia-occupied areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. The Russian armed formations have never stopped using the UAVs to drop grenades over Ukrainian positions. As a result, two Ukrainian servicemen were wounded this week.

Against the backdrop of the ongoing military build-up along the state border of Ukraine and in the occupied territories, Russia also expanded its escalation on the sea.

Yesterday the Russian fleet started military drill in the Black Sea. Frigates, patrol ships, missile ships, assault landing ships, minesweepers are involved. My question is what tasks are being worked out by the warships within assault and landing groups?

In the meantime, the territory of occupied Crimea is heavily militarized and continues to host a disproportionate number of weapon systems, including nuclear-capable, thus, further undermining the European security.

Excellencies,

Russia pursues dangerous escalation that goes hand in hand with massive disinformation campaign in order to prepare grounds for new provocations.

As Russia is looking for the false rational to justify a new attack, it is understandable why Russia is keeping people locked in the occupied territories. Rhetoric of the Russian leadership further indicates that ongoing illegal passportization is nothing else but the preparation of grounds for new aggressive acts under the humanitarian pretext in order to protect Russian passport holders. As it was the case for Crimea back in 2014. In this context, it is worth remembering that Russia has demonstrated that it can attack under cover.

However, miscalculation of both – the situation in Ukraine and the cost of occupation as it happened in 2014 – would lead to new drastic consequences for Russia itself.

There is still a chance to improve the situation and we call upon the Russian Federation to reconsider its approach. All obligations must be faithfully implemented and OSCE principles, including inviolability of borders, dully respected. The right of sovereign states to decide about their future themselves cannot be vetoed by one capital. And the threat to use force would never assist in building trust and common security in Europe. As long as our territories remain under the occupation and in view of continued attempts to undermine situation in Ukraine from inside, including with the use of cyber-attacks, one can hardly be convinced of Russia's peaceful intentions with regard to Ukraine or any other country in the region. As well, massive human rights violations in the occupied territories serve as a vivid reminder what the restoration of zones of influence, the Russian Federation is advocating for, would mean for the Eastern Europe.

Nevertheless, we believe that diplomatic engagement with Russia should continue on different tracks. That said, we welcome the intension of the CiO to launch a process within the OSCE with a focus on military transparency, risk reduction, incident prevention, conflict management, non-military aspects of security

In view of this yesterday's meeting of the N4 diplomatic advisors in Paris is a long-overdue step in a right direction. However, the work must be kept on substance proceeding from full respect of Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence.

That said we, however, regret that yesterday's TCG meeting ended yet again without meaningful results to move towards conflict resolution.

The statement by the Russian distinguished permanent representative at the last PC meeting sheds some light on Russia's attempts to re-write the Minsk agreements, as he claimed that decisions of so-called "contact group" were not implemented. And that's true. Because there is no such a group. Everybody knows from the very first sentence of the Minsk protocol that there is a Trilateral contact group and it consists of Ukraine, the Russian Federation and the OSCE.

So, we expect Russia to constructively engaged in the TCG work as a party to the conflict instead of promoting the false narrative of being a mediator.

There is a vast humanitarian agenda that should be delinked from the political agenda and be addressed without further delay in the TCG in order to ease the life of civilians in the conflict affected areas.

Opening of crossing points on the occupied part of the contact line, exchange of conflict-related detainees, ICRC access, demining are among pressing issues.

But the most urgent issue is ensuring of the sustainable and lasting cease-fire regime, as foreseen by all three Minsk agreements. This would have a very positive impact on the safety and security of civilians in Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine as would also create appropriate conditions for the progress on other tracks.

We also call upon the Russian Federation to allow the SMM to fulfil its work as tasked by the Permanent Council and foreseen by the Minsk agreements. All denials, impediments, restrictions, UAVs jamming must be finally ended. This would also help to sustain the ceasefire.

Enhancing monitoring capacities of the SMM, including by opening new FPBs and proving new technical means, would allow to use resources of the Mission in more effective manner.

As well the implementation of the 4 para of the Minsk protocol is needed to enhance transparency in the border areas through permanent monitoring and verification by the OSCE.

As more and more SMM reports show us the pictures of vehicles of different types and people illegally crossing uncontrolled part of the border I would also like to remind the Russian representative of Russia's commitments under the OSCE Border Security and Management Concept

Chapter II paragraph 4.1 of the Concept clearly states that movement of persons, goods, services and investments across borders should be promoted in conformity with relevant legal frameworks, international law and OSCE commitments, inter alia, through enhancing the security of travel documents.

So, I would ask the Russian delegation to explain us how the Russian Federation implements this provision with regard to those, who illegally cross the border between Russia and Ukraine, especially in so called "DPR/LPR registered vehicles".

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, including the withdrawal of its armed forces, mercenaries, armed formations, and weapons from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.