



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 1272nd meeting of the Permanent Council,
18 June 2020

Mr. Chairperson,

The armed conflict in eastern Ukraine, caused by Russia's military intervention and occupation, grinds on. In the first 5 months of 2020, the SMM registered over 91 thousand ceasefire violations in Donbas, 48 civilian casualties including six fatalities, and damage to 90 civilian objects, including operational education facilities, houses, apartments, and shops, as well as gas and electricity infrastructure. Dozens more of civilian casualties and reports of damaged properties are pending confirmation. The detailed statistics can be found in the SMM weekly report of 10 June. Ukrainian militaries continue to defend their soil from illegal armed formations, which are led, armed and financed by Russia. Only last week, one Ukrainian serviceman was killed and 11 wounded at the contact line, while the number of ceasefire violations recorded by the SMM has increased by 90 per cent.

Those are direct results of Russia-initiated conflict, which lasts for more than 6 years as of now.

Ukraine did not start this war. We do not want it to continue any single day more. We do everything possible to stop it in a peaceful politico-diplomatic way, without, of course, crossing such red lines as Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Last Friday, on 12 June, a representative Ukrainian delegation visited Paris to discuss in detail the efforts aimed at intensification of the peace negotiations between Ukraine and Russia within the Normandy Four and TCG. We appreciate the mediation efforts of France and Germany, and we look forward to the next N4 meeting at the level of Heads of State and Government in Berlin.

In parallel with this, Ukraine continues to seek ways to produce tangible results within the Trilateral Contact Group, including by widening and enhancing its representation within it. Last week, we heard in the meeting of the Permanent Council a number of groundless accusations by the Russian delegation on Ukraine's, I quote, "absence of commitment to constructive work", end of quote. This is an obvious fake, aimed to cover Russia's evasion of its responsibility as a party to the conflict. Hiding behind its proxies, the Russian side makes demands, which it knows could not be met, and then blames Ukraine for not taking them as granted.

Despite this, we continue our efforts directed at resolution and mitigation of dire security, social-economic and humanitarian consequences of Russia's ongoing aggression. Ukraine's sovereignty in Russia-occupied parts of Donbas must be restored. This was the purpose of all three Minsk agreements, approved by Ukraine, Russia and the international community in 2014 and 2015. Russia's legislation, tax system and currency, which were illegally imposed by the Russian side since that time, must be revoked.

The need for the full restoration of Ukrainian legislation in the temporarily occupied territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine, and restoration of taxation and payment systems within the Ukrainian legal framework, was stressed in particular by the Ukrainian delegation at the TCG meeting on 15 June. The conduct of an inventory of public and private property in the temporarily occupied parts of Donbas, in particular enterprises of all forms of ownership, including branches of banking institutions, expropriated by the Russian side, is necessary in this regard. The delegation of Ukraine also insisted during the meeting on ensuring the functioning of mobile communications in the temporarily occupied areas of Donbas by Ukrainian mobile network operators, emphasizing that it is primarily related to the humanitarian needs.

The Russian occupation administration in Donetsk and Luhansk continues to disregard the humanitarian needs of local residents. Despite Ukrainian government's decision to reopen the entry-exit checkpoints in Stanytsia Luhanska and Marinka, the corresponding checkpoints of the Russian armed formations remained closed at the contact line, as confirmed by the SMM. Let me stress that the Russian occupation administration had been informed of reopening of EECPs in advance. Still, hundreds of people were denied crossing. The only exception took place on 13, 14 and 16 June, when several dozens of persons were allowed to move through Stanytsia Luhanska EECP in both directions due to the special personal and humanitarian circumstances.

To allow the crossings of the line of contact, the Russian occupation administration in Donetsk has put forward the following prerequisites to allow the existing EECPs to reopen. In particular, they urged to allow the crossing of the line of contact from the temporarily occupied areas in the Donetsk region to the Government-controlled areas for everyone, who wants to cross the line of contact. On their part, they agree to allow the entry of people from the Government-controlled areas only according to the preliminary agreed name-lists.

You can draw your own conclusions on the feasibility of such demands for hundreds of thousands of people who were crossing the contact line every month before the temporary quarantine restrictions were imposed. Starting from 15 June, all EECPs at the administrative boundary line between Kherson region and temporarily occupied Crimea were also reopened by the Ukrainian side. The Russian occupants did not respond by opening their respective EECPs, similarly to the situation in Donbas.

Russia's disregard for humanitarian needs of the population living in the conflict-affected areas is also clearly visible in its continued practice of using civilians as a human shield. On 12 June, the Russian proxies placed mortars in the occupied village of Sakhanka and shelled residential area of the village of Shyrokyne. Next day, they did the same by delivering 122mm artillery fire from the village of Kalininske, placing artillery in the immediate vicinity of the houses of civilians.

Monitoring capacities of the OSCE SMM remain severely limited in the temporarily occupied parts of Donbas. Last week, all but one non-mine related restrictions of the Mission's freedom of movement again took place in Russia-occupied areas. Despite the calls by participating States to stop this practice, the Russian side continues to undermine the SMM activities.

Following the purposeful destruction of the camera system in Petrivske disengagement area by gunfire delivered by the Russian proxies, the Mission informed in its most recent weekly report that its ability to effectively monitor developments in this disengagement area was severely limited.

Nothing on the ground indicates Russia's readiness to stop the conflict it has initiated in February 2014. Moreover, the Kremlin regime continues to destroy the long-term prospects for future reintegration of the temporarily occupied parts of Ukraine, strengthening their social, economic and legal links with the Russian Federation.

The ongoing so-called "passportization" of Ukrainian citizens in Donbas and Crimea is one of the most dangerous forms of this policy. Forced imposition of Russian citizenship in the temporarily occupied parts of Ukraine is not only a flagrant violation of the Ukrainian and international law, but an unacceptable element of pressure on the local residents as well. Civil and property rights, personal safety and fundamental freedoms, all of them can be compromised if a person refuses to take a Russian passport. We are gravely concerned with Russian officials' announcements on the intention to issue up to 800.000 passports in the temporarily occupied areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine till the end of 2020.

The Ukrainian side severely condemns this practice and does not recognize the coercive citizenship acquired by the citizens of Ukraine residing on the temporarily occupied territory. Moreover, recent statement of the Russian occupational administration on the participation of residents of the occupied territories in the Donetsk and Luhansk region, who hold illegally issued Russian passports, in Russian constitutional referendum is nothing but another testimony of total disregard to sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. We thank those participating States, which pursue a policy of non-recognition of such Russian passports, and call on others to act likewise.

The human rights situation in the temporarily occupied Crimean peninsula shows no sign of improvement. Last week, we drew attention of the Permanent Council to the Russian occupation authorities' persecution campaign against those who demonstrate their support for victims of the occupation regime. This practice continues. On 11 June, the Russian security service detained Crimean Tatar Ruslan Bekirov, who had earlier refused to give false testimony against political prisoner Enver Seytosmanov, but also lodged a formal complaint over the pressure put on him by Russian officials to force him to deliver lies. This pressure included threats of sentence for ten years, never seeing his parents again, imprisonment with infected prisoners, including those suffering from tuberculosis, serving sentence far away from his home, and the fine of two hundred thousand roubles. That is how Russia's repressive machine works in the temporarily occupied Crimea. We will continue to follow the developments in Crimea and call on the OSCE, its structures and all participating States to remain seized of the matter.

We again urge the Russian Federation to reverse its illegal occupation of Crimea, militarization of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, and to stop its aggression against Ukraine, including by withdrawing its armed formations, militants and their hardware from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and fully implementing its commitments under the Minsk agreements.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.