



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International
Organizations in Vienna

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Statement on “Russia’s ongoing aggression against Ukraine and illegal occupation of Crimea”

As delivered by Ambassador Ihor Prokopchuk,
Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,
to the 1178th meeting of the Permanent Council,
8 March 2018

Mr. Chairperson,

Last week Russian President Vladimir Putin asserted in his annual address to the Federal Assembly that “the growing military might of Russia was a guarantee of peace on our planet”. Not dwelling about the planet, we will point out that in the OSCE space the worth of Russia’s “peace guarantees” is well known as in the past ten years Russia started two wars against two sovereign neighbouring states – against Georgia in 2008 and against Ukraine in 2014. The human cost of Russia’s war against Ukraine is devastating – over 30 thousand casualties, among them over 10 thousand killed. A large part of the mentioned address last week was devoted to new and “fantastic” Russian weapons making it clear that militarism and revanchism will maintain their role as the main drivers of Russia’s foreign and internal policy. Unfortunately, instead of focusing on domestic economic challenges, institutional failures, aging population, the Russian authoritarian regime will continue to present broad-ranging threats to the European security and artificially generate images of external enemies to preserve its grip on power.

In this reality Russia’s aggression against Ukraine continues to be seen by Kremlin as a tool for scoring electoral points in the run-up to re-election of Vladimir Putin for the fourth presidential term. Yet another recommitment to a comprehensive, sustainable and unlimited ceasefire in Donbas, agreed within the TCG last Friday and starting from 5 March 2018, did not last. Only one hour after the ceasefire entered into force on midnight of Monday, the Russian armed formations broke it by shelling Shchastia with 82mm mortars, rocket launchers and small arms. Notably, the day before, an SMM UAV spotted “four mortars in firing positions” and “ten military-type trucks, several of which were assessed as loaded with ammunition crates for mortars” several kilometers to south-east of Shchastia “in areas outside of government control”, in violation of withdrawal lines. Two more attacks of the Russian armed formations took place on the same day, leaving one Ukrainian serviceman wounded. Three targeted attacks were carried out the following day, killing one Ukrainian soldier. One Ukrainian serviceman was wounded yesterday.

We strongly condemn Russia's persisting unwillingness to fulfill the very first security provisions of the Minsk agreements more than three years after they were signed by Russia as a party to the conflict.

Mr. Chairperson,

The TCG ceasefire recommitment of 2 March was preceded by 25 per cent increase of ceasefire violations and a fourfold increase in the use of Minsk-proscribed weapons along the contact line in Donbas, as registered by the SMM in its weekly report of 27 February. Notably, in that week the SMM spotted increased number (52) of instances of weapons in violation of withdrawal lines and weapons outside designated storage sites (167), with overwhelming majority of such instances in the occupied parts of Donbas. In one single day of 25 February, 76 tanks were revealed by aerial imagery of the SMM near villages of Ternove and Kruhlyk.

The aerial imagery remains the principal monitoring mechanism available for the SMM to register the Russian heavy weapons in the occupied Donbas. The SMM patrols are denied access, blocked, threatened and attacked by the Russian fighters. A matter of utmost concern to us are the continuing cases of threats and intimidation of the SMM monitors by Russian fighters with the use of firearms. On 5 March, a Russian fighter near Kozatske 36km north-east of Mariupol pointed his assault rifle directly at the SMM vehicle and threatened to make the patrol leave the area. He demanded in hostile language to "leave immediately, and if you come closer, I will shoot". We condemn the ongoing systematic campaign of intimidation of SMM monitors in Russia-occupied part of Donbas and call upon Russia to put an immediate end to it. We urge Russia to realize its responsibility for the safety and security of SMM monitors and act accordingly.

Increased numbers of Russian weapons lead to more ceasefire violations and more restrictions of the SMM freedom of movement in Russia-occupied parts of Donbas. The weekly report of 27 February informs about 28 non-mine related restrictions, whereas in the previous two weeks 32 cases were registered in total. As before, only one such restriction took place in the government-controlled areas. Full responsibility for large-scale restrictions in the occupied parts rests with the Russian Federation, which continues to act contrary to its commitments. On 2 March near non-government-controlled Patriotychne 35km north-east of Mariupol, a Russian fighter responded to the SMM that he was aware that denial of access was a restriction of freedom of movement and it was not his concern. Recent "new instructions" provided by the Russian occupation administration in Luhansk to the fighters at border crossing points which ban SMM patrols from approaching and monitoring the checkpoints point out to further significant restriction of space for SMM activities. The weekly report of 27 February confirms that "in areas outside of government control, members of the armed formations denied the SMM access to five border areas of Luhansk region outside government control near the Russian Federation in 14 instances." Siedove, a town on the Azov sea coast near the border with the Russian Federation and currently occupied by Russian forces, remains blocked for the SMM since April 2017. Whereas severe restrictions on the SMM monitoring at the border are imposed, the illegal traffic of Russian troops and

weaponry across the border continues. The Ukrainian competent authorities registered, for example, that on 26 February a column consisting of 7 trucks loaded with mortar rounds of two calibers and antipersonnel mines headed from the Russian territory to Russia-occupied Debaltseve through the border check-point of Dyakove. Illegal movements such as this make it absolutely critical to seek implementation of the Minsk agreements provision on ensuring the permanent OSCE monitoring at the Ukrainian-Russian state border. Russia's rejection of implementation of this provision testifies to the lack of interest in peaceful resolution of the conflict and to continuing disrespect for core OSCE principles and commitments.

Distinguished colleagues,

The ongoing Russian aggression continues to ruin lives of peaceful Ukrainian citizens forced to stay under the temporary Russian occupation or to leave their homes and become IDPs. We noted in the last PC meeting that nearly 40 thousand Ukrainian citizens (including over 20 thousand Crimean Tatars) were forced to leave the occupied Crimea and settle in other areas of Ukraine. Many of them stayed in Kherson region of Ukraine, which is adjacent to the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. The SMM daily report of 28 February informed about a public gathering of Crimean Tatars who were protesting against Russia's illegal occupation of Crimea. The Crimean Tatar people who had been deported from their native land by the Soviet totalitarian regime in 1944 have been once again expelled from their land by Moscow.

Those who stay under foreign occupation continue to be deprived of their rights and freedoms. On 1 March, a Crimean Tatar activist Suleiman Kadyrov received a suspended two years sentence by the Russian occupation court in Feodosia for a mere comment on Ukrainian Crimea in a social network.

As the number of Ukrainian political prisoners in Russia continues to increase and Russia shows no readiness for their release, last Thursday the Ukrainian Parliament adopted an appeal to the parliaments of foreign states and parliamentary assemblies of the international organizations to condemn the political repressions committed by the Russian Federation against the citizens of Ukraine and to step up pressure on Russia to seek immediate release of all hostages who are in captivity due to Russian armed aggression against Ukraine.

We again urge the Russian Federation to reverse the illegal occupation of Crimea and Sevastopol, and to stop its aggression, including by withdrawing its armed formations from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and fully implementing its commitments under the Minsk agreements. We urge the Russian Federation to restore respect to its obligations under international law, to the OSCE principles and commitments.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.