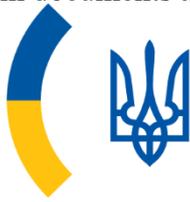


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Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International
Organizations in Vienna

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 1346th meeting of the Permanent Council
25 November 2021

Madam Chairperson,

Russia's continues reluctance to engage into diplomatic and political dialogue raises concerns about true intentions of its military activities in the border areas. The dramatic increase in the number of ceasefire violations along the contact line is of particular concern to the Ukrainian side and our international partners.

The total size of the Russian Armed Forces, spearhead in the Ukrainian direction currently exceeds 93 thousand military personnel.

The Russian command also continues to build up the military readiness of its forces in the temporarily occupied areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. The total number of these forces amount to 35,500 servicemen with the Russian generals and officers in command. On 22 November, a command-and staff exercise was launched with the participation of mobilization reserve and Russian occupation administrations. The exercise is supervised by a commission of the 8th army of the Russian Southern military district.

At the same time, we observe a surge in Russian disinformation and a new wave of false accusations against Ukraine, which is allegedly plotting a military provocation in the direction of Donbas or Crimea. Even absurd threats that "Ukraine could implode at any given moment" followed further. Here I quote a Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation N.Patrushev.

Symbolically, the Russian leadership makes these ridiculous accusations against Ukraine on the eve on the anniversary of a Mainila provocation. On 26 November 1939 several Soviet border guards were killed near the Soviet village of Mainila. This false flag operation was staged by the Soviet Union as a pretext to 'legitimize' its launch of the so-called "Winter War". The well-known Russian playbook is put back in use.

In light of this recent developments, let me quote for the record the official statement by Foreign Minister of Ukraine Dmytro Kuleba: "Ukraine does not plan a military offensive in the Donbas. We are committed to seeking political and diplomatic solutions to the conflict. Ukraine keeps working hard to revive the Normandy format with Germany and France as mediators. We call upon Russia to engage constructively in these peace efforts instead of undermining them". End of quote.

The opening of the two new EECs Zolote and Shchastia, finalization of the demining plans and disengagement areas, release of the detainees could be important outcomes of such constructive engagement, including into the TCG work, which, according to the very first sentence of the Minsk protocol, consists of Ukraine, the Russian Federation and the OSCE.

Let me stress once again. Ukraine remains committed to the Minsk agreements and stands ready to discuss with Russia next steps for a peaceful settlement of the conflict within the TCG as well as in the N4 format.

Excellencies,

At the last PC meeting, the Russian delegate dwelled about the attempts to shift the focus of the SMM away from the contact line.

Yet, considering that about 90 per cent of restrictions are taking place in the occupied territories let me ask, who in fact denies the SMM's access to the contact line?

The unimpeded freedom of movement for the SMM throughout the territory of Ukraine, and in particular its access to the contact line, is exactly what Ukraine has been calling for continuously. And yes, we believe that freedom of movement of the OSCE SMM and its proper engagement would contribute to reducing tension, thus preventing further possible provocations along the contact line. We reiterate once again that the SMM's immunities and privileges must be fully respected, and any threats to the safety of the Mission's personnel and its assets are unacceptable.

However, despite statements by the Russian delegation, the restrictions in the occupied territories continue. Just two days ago, on 23 November, the Russian armed formations denied SMM patrols access at the checkpoints near Zolote, Stanytsia Luhanska, and Molodizhne.

Days before, on 19 November, the SMM was also denied access at a checkpoint in Staromykhailivka, while the patrol's task was to follow up on allegations of damaged civilian property. Furthermore, the Russian armed formations threatened to shoot down the SMM's UAV. On 18 November, near Ozerianivka the SMM was also not allowed to fly its UAV.

Restrictions near the disengagement area in Zolote continue to prevent the SMM from crossing the contact line in Luhansk region.

Per Mission's own assessment, such denials obstruct the SMM's freedom of movement, which is essential for its effective functioning.

So, following the statement made by the Russian delegate at the last PC meeting, can we finally assume that the Russian armed formations would stop denials, closure of roads, jamming, security checks with respect to the SMM personnel?

During the last meeting, the Russian delegation also said that the SMM did not report about the UAVs Orlan 10. That's not true. The Mission observed this UAVs as well as other highly sophisticated Russian military equipment, such as Zhitel jamming device, indiscriminate combat system TOS-1 Buratino and MLRS Grad-K or acquisition radar Kasta-2E1 and so on. However, the Russian side has never provided explanation about the presence of these systems in the occupied territories.

Maybe, that explains why the SMM patrols have been systematically denied access to the border areas, just as it been in the case at the railway station in Voznesenivka, where cargo railway cars were observed? By the way, Voznesenivka is right across the border from the Russian BCP Gukovo, where the BOM had been deployed until it was closed following Russia's veto on its prolongation.

In the meantime, the Russian side continues asserting that the movement of the Russian troops in the border areas constitutes no threat to Ukraine and that there is no unlawful activity through the border.

If it is so, it is high time to implement Paragraph four of the Minsk protocol, which provide for permanent monitoring on the Ukrainian-Russian state border and verification by OSCE, along with the establishment of a security area in the border regions of Ukraine and the Russian Federation.

We also count on support of the Russian Federation for opening additional FPBs, as had been foreseen long time ago, in the occupied territories. Apart from that, enhancing technical capabilities of the Mission, including with long range UAVs fleet, would not only enhance SMM's logistic operations and simplify its access to the border areas but also make available more SMM patrols, including for monitoring of the contact line.

This is requested by the SMM itself in its recent Concept note of 12 November. The Mission asks the participating States to provide political support in the area where the SMM is facing the biggest challenges to its monitoring activities. And we, as participating States, have to provide such support.

And last but not least, we call upon the Russian Federation to join to the draft MC decision on the OSCE monitoring of the Ukrainian border areas, which is already co-sponsored by 37 participating States

Excellencies,

New detentions of Crimean Tatar activists in the occupied Crimea deserve our full attention. **THIRTY-ONE** Crimean Tatars, including women and journalists, were detained while waiting near the detention centre to greet lawyer Edem Semedlyayev, whose term of illegal detention had expired.

We call upon the Russian Federation to uphold its obligations under international humanitarian law and human rights law and to immediately release all illegally detained Ukrainian citizens.

We are also concerned about the negative implications of the construction by the occupying Power of infrastructure projects, such as Tavrida highway, which facilitates nothing else but further militarization of Crimea.

The Tavrida project is accompanied by the expropriation of land, demolition of houses and depletion of natural and agricultural resources, which have a negative impact on the Crimean ecology and leads to profound change in the demographic structure of the peninsula.

Last week, the Russian occupation administration decided that the highway would pass through the village of Zarichne, or as it was known before the deportation of Crimean Tatars in 1944 – the village of Şumhay [Шумхай]. It means that dozens of families are forced to leave the village, as their houses will be demolished.

At the same time, Russia is also using tactics of the house destruction in more targeted manner in order to silence any opposition to its occupation as well as to dispel non-loyals from the peninsula.

Just yesterday, house of elderly Crimean Tatar activist Rustem Useinov was illegally demolished in his absence.

The Russian occupation authorities literally deprive the Crimean Tatars of a right to live on their own land. Such a heinous behavior is absolutely unacceptable.

Therefore, 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, Madam Chairperson.