



PERMANENT DELEGATION OF NORWAY
TO THE OSCE

THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION'S ONGOING AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE

As delivered by Ambassador Anne-Kirsti Karlsen at the Permanent Council,
Vienna, 26 May 2022

Thank you,

Norway aligns herself with the statement made by the European Union and stands fully behind its content but allow me some remarks in my national capacity.

This week marks three months of devastating war in Ukraine, after the Russian invasion started on 24 February. Three months of unimaginable suffering for the Ukrainian population: the loss of loved ones, severe injuries, separation of families, destruction of homes and infrastructure, and millions forced to seek refuge and safety in new places.

Mr. Chair,

This week I chaired a meeting in the Human Dimension Committee focused on the impact of conflict on local democracy.

Whereas the strategic and political discussions take place on a higher level, the local communities are faced with the day-to-day consequences of the war.

The functioning of effective democratic institutions at local level is essential if crises occur, as they shape and implement the democratic responses. In the meeting on Tuesday, the Head of the Department of Social Services in Lviv region, Mr. Viktor Stepaniuk, informed us that they are working at full capacity to accommodate more than 240,000 internally displaced persons at the moment. That is 240,000 lives in need of good care and safety, including schooling, work, health services, social benefits, and accommodation. They are in dire need for support to strengthen their infrastructure in order to grant their citizens the services they require.

Local democratic institutions need to coordinate, facilitate, and assist people arriving, while simultaneously upholding and protecting the rights of their local citizens. It is evident that such a situation poses numerous challenges and trials. The situation in Lviv

is one example of how large movements of people carry critical consequences for local communities, cities and institutions who receive them in Ukraine. In HDC we were also given examples from states outside of Ukraine and the coordination taking place across Europe in receiving refugees. It was evident that there are many who want to help - from individuals, NGOs, churches, and businesses to local authorities - but it requires good coordination, efficient administration, excellent management, and an abundance of resources to handle the situation.

During the Supplementary Human Dimension meeting last week, we heard Ukrainian representatives describe the situation as a war against democracy and democratic reforms that Ukraine has spent years to implement. We also heard how local communities struggled to preserve their schools and education systems, so crucial to preserve the democratic structures and to ensure the future for the Ukrainian children.

While talking about local democracy, democratic reforms, and fundamental freedoms in Ukraine, we should not forget the parts of Ukraine that are under Russian control. Freedom House has written the following about the so-called “Peoples Republics” of Donetsk and Luhansk: I quote: Politics within the territories are tightly controlled by the security services, leaving no room for meaningful opposition. Local media are also under severe restrictions, and social media users have been arrested for critical posts. The rule of law and civil liberties in general are not respected. Unquote.

In addition, we hear eyewitnesses talk about torture, censorship, disappearances, and confiscation of private property. This is happening in the very areas that Russia now uses as a pretext to invade Ukraine and has set out to “liberate”.

Mr Chair,

Local democratic institutions in Ukraine and all over Europe and the wider OSCE region are paying a part of the price for this war. It should be stopped, and I reiterate yet again that the Russian Federation has the key to stop the atrocities.

Still, let me conclude by saying how impressed I am with the work that is being done, on the local level, by authorities and the civil society, to cover the basic needs and secure the basic rights of vulnerable people. That is a source of hope. It should inspire us to continue our efforts also here in the OSCE.

Thank you.