



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 1349th meeting of the Permanent Council
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Madam Chairperson,

As we are approaching the end of the year, the current trends are extremely worrying. The ceasefire violations are on the rise, people are being locked in the occupied territories, SMM's intimidation sets the record, with BOM closure the border transparency is in its weakest point since 2014, incorporation of the occupied territories into the Russian political space continues through passportization, economic measures and even by expending the presence of the Russian ruling party therein. Against this backdrop, the Russian additional troops have been massing on Ukraine's borders and in the occupied territories since April.

In other words, first, Russia has been occupying Crimea and Donbas for almost 8 years, then it raises stakes with the threat of another more deadly invasion and at the end it demands security guarantees for itself.

It is how Russian bluffs and ultimatums look like. Russia creates a problem, then invites others to discuss concessions in order to resolve it.

Let me quote the recent article by Ukrainian Minister Kuleba. And I quote. "History shows that pledges of neutrality by Ukraine or any other country in the region do nothing to abate Putin's appetite; rather, they feed it ... Back in 2014, Ukraine was a neutral country, both on paper and in reality ... If neutrality failed to stop Putin from launching a war in 2014, it is hard to see why it would stop him now". End of quote.

However, if the Russian side is serious about the European security, then what we need to discuss with Moscow is restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition of the aggression in the region.

Is the Russian Federation ready for that kind of discussion? Rather opposite. No withdrawal of the Russian forces is observed and belligerent rhetoric threatening to destroy Ukraine continues, showing that the military option remains open.

A few days ago, after getting a question whether Russia would attack Ukraine, the Russian president evaded the answer. Instead, he hypocritically stated that Russia pursues a peaceful policy, however, repeated determination to ensure its security.

Later, Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Forces Valeriy Gerasimov once again hinted about Russia's readiness to "crush any Ukrainian military provocations" in Donbas. So, let me once again state as clear as it is, Ukraine is not planning any offensives in the region and remains committed to the peaceful settlement of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

However, former head of the Russian occupation administration in Donetsk in May 2014, and now member of the ruling party 'United Russia' in the State Duma Aleksandr Borodai is even more blatant calling simply to kill Ukrainians.

In parallel, a new campaign of blackening Ukrainians as extremists has been launched in Russia. The only Ukrainian journalist accredited in Russia is also targeted.

It strongly resembles campaigns of the 30th in the Soviet Union, when some anti-state centers were widely invented in order to justify the purges against whole nations.

Recent public survey in Russia shows dangerous consequences of such rhetoric – about 75% of the Russians admit the possibility of war with Ukraine.

Sentiments of the Russian leadership are getting even more clear after another documentary with the participation of the Russian president which was broadcast just recently on the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Soviet Union. For Vladimir Putin the break-up of the Union is the collapse of a historical Russia.

As president Putin saw his key task afterwards was to recover the economy, and after that to rebuild military complex and the Russian army. It is true, with growing oil and gas revenues, Russia's military expenditures were steadily increasing from 2000. The consequences of this strategy are quite visible today.

Excellencies,

Russia continues military exercises to bring units in the occupied areas to a higher level of combat readiness. From December 6 to 10, the exercises were conducted related to the development of tank, artillery and motorized rifles units into assembly areas and deployment of the command control centre.

In the meantime, only on 8 December, the SMM spotted 129 tanks, 42 howitzers, 12 mortars, 9 surface-to-air missiles, and 6 anti-tanks guns in five training areas in non-government-controlled areas of Luhansk region.

Can we imagine what could be the real number of violations if the SMM did not face the severe restriction of the freedom of movement?

However, the Russian delegation is trying to shift radically the focus of the discussion and to present false reasons for the violations of the SMM's mandate.

But let's consult the past reports. It proves that these restrictions are systematic and aim to blind the Mission. According to them, the number of impediments in the occupied territories was constantly high and exceeded 90%. Also, monitoring of border areas continued to be systematically limited due to restrictions to the Mission's access both in the areas and on routes leading towards them.

Despite extremely challenging security and political environment, Ukraine remains committed to the implementation of the Minsk agreements (Minsk Protocol, Minsk Memorandum and Minsk Package of Measures) and agreements in the "Normandy format", which remain an important basis for a lasting political solution of the conflict.

On 30 November, the draft constitutional amendments on decentralization were published. Further intensive public consultations are foreseen. Furthermore, last week Ukraine exerted all possible efforts, literally on the edge of its redlines, in order to agree a joint statement on the ceasefire before the Christmas holidays.

Unfortunately, the TCG meeting on 7 – 8 December and the extraordinary TCG meeting that followed on 9 December yet again ended without tangible results. We regret that Ukraine's resolve is not matched by a similar political will of Russia.

We strongly believe that the progress on the ground, that is the recommitment to the ceasefire; demining; new disengagement areas; opening of EECPS; ICRC access to detainees and their mutual release, could break the current deadlock.

On the other hand, ensuring SMM's unimpeded and safe access, enhancing its monitoring capacities, opening new FPBs, stopping jamming of UAVs, as well as implementation of the para 4 of the Minsk protocol would both contribute to the de-escalation and military transparency along both the contact line and state border between Ukraine and the Russian Federation.

To that end, we call on Russia to engage constructively in the discussion within the TCG as well as within the N4 format.

Excellencies,

Last week I brought your attention to the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of the fourth resolution on the militarization of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine, as well as parts of the Black

Sea and the Sea of Azov. This resolution appeared to be very timely and right to the point.

As of December 10, the Russian Federation blocked about 70 per cent of the Sea of Azov. The restriction of navigation was done under the pretext of the artillery fire in areas near Mariupol, Berdyansk and Henichesk, in fact, in immediate vicinity of the civilian ports. The presence of the Black Sea Fleet vessels in the Sea of Azov is also worrying.

That said, I would like once again to repeat my previous call on the SMM to follow the social and economic consequences of this blockade for the Ukrainian ports.

Later today, the UN General Assembly will also vote on the sixth consecutive draft resolution on the human rights situation in Crimea. Constant attention to the situation in the occupied Crimea is extremely important, as public exposure of crimes committed there by the occupying Power helps to save many lives.

Especially, prisoners and illegal detainees need our support and attention, as Russia continues its systematic repressive campaign. A few days ago, new illegal search of Crimean Tatars' house resulted in the detention of 23-year-old Kurtumer Chalozov. He was interrogated in the case of Nariman Dzhelyal and Akhtemov cousins before being released.

Against this grim backdrop, on 10 December, Ukrainian writers and journalists became ambassadors of 13 Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar political prisoners in Russia and Crimea. They will support imprisoned citizen journalists Osman Arifmemetov, Marlen Asanov, Asan Akhtemov, Remzi Bekirov, Tymur Ibrahimov, Server Mustafayev, Seyran Saliyev, Amet Suleymanov, Ruslan Suleymanov and Rustem Sheykhaliyev, journalists Oleksiy Bessarabov, Vladyslav Yesypenko, as well as Nariman Dzhelyal, the First Deputy Chairman of the Mejlis of Crimean Tatar People, a former journalist.

Using this opportunity, I would like to invite the participating States to join the campaign. Also, we believe that further engagement of OSCE's autonomous institutions would significantly contribute to addressing human rights violations.

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.

As a final remark of today's statement, let me thank you, Madam Chairperson, and your entire team for maintaining focused attention to the topic of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict throughout the year of Swedish Chairpersonship in the OSCE, as well as other distinguished delegations for their strong statements in support of Ukraine and OSCE principles. We look forward to continue these efforts with the incoming Polish Chairpersonship.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.