



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International
Organizations in Vienna

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Statement on “Russia’s ongoing aggression against Ukraine”

As delivered by Ambassador Ihor Prokopchuk,
Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,
to the 1177th meeting of the Permanent Council,
1 March 2018

Mr. Chairperson,

Over the two weeks since the last meeting of the Permanent Council the security situation in the conflict-affected area of Donbas remained volatile and unpredictable as the Russian armed formations continued to defy their commitments on the ceasefire and withdrawal of weapons. As a result nearly every day sad news are coming about new casualties among Ukrainian servicemen and civilians – killed and wounded. Unfortunately, we do not observe any sign of the change of attitude on the part of the Russian authorities concerning implementation of commitments undertaken by Russia in the Minsk agreements.

Contrary to its Minsk commitments, Russia maintains its formidable invasion force on the sovereign territory of Ukraine and is constantly moving its armed formations and heavy weapons across the temporarily occupied parts of Donbas. On 19 February, the SMM spotted 140 pieces of heavy weapons near Myrne and 45 pieces of heavy weapons near Shymshynivka; the following day, there were only five tanks registered near Myrne. On 21 February, an SMM mini UAV spotted 31 tanks near Kruhlyk; the following day, only five tanks were seen by the SMM in that area. Near Miusynsk, where a large number of heavy weapons has been reported by the SMM on many occasions in the past, in one single day of 21 February an SMM mini-UAV spotted 86 pieces of heavy weapons, including three multiple launch rocket systems in firing positions. On 23 February the SMM mini-UAV spotted 28 tanks in a facility inside the Donetsk city. As before, because of numerous restrictions the SMM is able to register only a fraction of Russian weapons amassed by Russian military command on the Ukrainian territory, but even those figures of heavy weapons are telling about the scale of Russian presence.

Distinguished colleagues,

Approaching the extension of the SMM mandate for another 12 months period, we emphasise it to the Russian delegation that Russia bears responsibility, as a party

to the conflict and a signatory of the Minsk agreements, for the safety, security and freedom of movement of the SMM in Russia-occupied parts of Donbas. We call upon Russia to fully exercise this responsibility and allow the SMM to implement its mandate without impediments.

So far, the Russian armed formations do not let the SMM to implement its plans on “opening of ten additional FPBs and one patrol hub”, instead they keep squeezing the SMM out of the already existing forward patrol bases. On the evening of 22 February when the SMM staff returned to its base in Popasna after two months of temporary relocation, the SMM registered dozens of outgoing mortar rounds south-east of this base, from the area where the Russian fighters were positioned. The next day, in the evening and night of 23-24 February, the SMM registered dozens of outgoing artillery and mortar rounds, including 152mm caliber, fired from the same Russia-controlled area. These attacks by Russian armed formations endanger lives, cause destruction and aim to provoke response of the Ukrainian military. These attacks again made the SMM staff take the decision to leave the FPB and return to its patrol hub in Sievierodonetsk.

We continue to witness with great alarm the growing scale of restrictions imposed by the Russian occupation administration in Donbas to the freedom of movement of the SMM. The two weekly reports of 14 and 21 February inform about 32 non-mine related restrictions, with only one of them in the government-controlled areas. The Russian fighters continue to deny access of the SMM to a number of so-called “restricted cities” and border areas. They allow the SMM to pass only after checking trailers and forcing to share intended destination. They prevent the SMM from fulfilling its mandate telling that permission from senior representatives of the Russian occupation administration is required to establish the facts and to have contact with the local population, including medical and school staff. They have once again denied access of the SMM to the so-called “humanitarian convoy” sent on 22 February to Donbas by the Russian Federation in violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity and the principles of international humanitarian law. Notably, the OSCE observers at the “Donetsk” BCP reported on 10 trucks crossing the state border, whereas the SMM registered on that day 41 such trucks in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. We again strongly condemn this illegal practice by the Russian authorities and urge that any humanitarian assistance is delivered through government controlled check-points on the Ukrainian-Russian state border until an international mechanism is mutually agreed and becomes operational in accordance with the Minsk agreements.

Mr. Chairperson,

The access of the SMM to the segment of the Ukrainian-Russian state border which is currently controlled by Russia from one side of the border and its occupation administration in Donbas from another side remains extremely limited. The objection by the Russian Federation to the establishment of permanent OSCE monitoring testifies to its unwillingness to have transparency at the border, to implement the undertaken commitments and take the path of peaceful politico-diplomatic resolution of the conflict.

Meanwhile, the already conditioned access became even more complicated and unsecure for the SMM patrols working in the occupied areas of Luhansk regions. Daily reports published by the SMM in the last two weeks inform on “new instructions” provided by the Russian occupation administration in Luhansk to the fighters at border crossing points in Izvaryne, Dovzhanske, Sievernyi and Voznesenivka, who ban the SMM patrols from approaching the checkpoints, tell them to leave the area immediately or after 15 minutes, request the SMM patrol plans to be “approved with a stamp” and force the SMM members to present their national passports.

It is clear that without transparency and international verification at the border the prospects of de-escalation and resolution of this international armed conflict, started by Russia, will remain elusive. We call upon the Russian Federation to immediately remove impediments for the SMM’s work and contribute by practical measures to facilitating the monitoring activities of the SMM in the parts of Donbas, occupied by Russia.

We again urge the Russian Federation to reverse the illegal occupation of Crimea and Sevastopol, and to stop its aggression against Ukraine, including by withdrawing its armed formations from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and fully implementing its commitments under the Minsk agreements. We remind the Russian Federation that it remains in clear, gross and uncorrected violation of the OSCE principles and commitments and further aggravates these violations by continuing the aggression.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.