



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 1180th meeting of the Permanent Council,
22 March 2018

Mr. Chairperson,

Assessing the security situation in the conflict-affected areas of Donbas we note that, alongside reduction of overall number of cease-fire violations, a comprehensive and sustainable ceasefire has not been observed: on some days, the number of violations fluctuated up to three-digit numbers. In the course of the last week the Russian armed formations in Donbas continued using the announced recommitment to ceasefire for reinforcement of their military positions on the sovereign territory of Ukraine. As registered by the SMM, newly established checkpoints of Russian armed formations were spotted in the north-west, west and south of Luhansk city.

Tanks, towed artillery and military-type armoured vehicles are located throughout the Russia-occupied part of Donbas, often in violation of the withdrawal lines. Again dozens and even hundreds of pieces of heavy weapons were spotted by the SMM near Miusynsk, Buhaivka, Myrne, Kruhlyk and Ternove. Most of them have never been placed by the Russian side into heavy weapons holding areas and reported to the SMM, thus remaining a constant source of instability and military threat. For instance, according to the SMM daily report of 15 March, on one day of 13 March the SMM registered in different locations 40 pieces of artillery, 49 tanks and about 90 armoured vehicles. Another 13 tanks were observed the following day.

Distinguished colleagues,

Despite numerous irrefutable evidence of Russia’s large-scale military presence in the occupied territories of Ukraine, the Russian side continues to deny its role as a party to the conflict. Whereas the Russian armed formations place significant restrictions on the SMM activities in Russia-occupied parts of Donbas, the Russian delegation would call in the Permanent Council for “more intensive patrolling” by the SMM. Let us be very clear on this point: more intensive patrolling is not possible in the situation when, for the latest example, the SMM encountered

22 non-mine related impediments, as registered in the weekly report of 13 March, “all in areas outside government control, including at the international border with the Russian Federation and during the verification of weapons that should have been withdrawn”. A long segment of the state border controlled only by Russia and its occupation administration and supplies of Russian manpower, weapons and ammunition: those are the two main factors, which continue to fuel the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Until effectively addressed, they will further undermine the prospects of peaceful diplomatic settlement.

“For the third consecutive week”, as underscored in the SMM weekly report of 13 March, “members of the armed formations, citing orders from superiors, denied the SMM access to border crossing points and at a railway station close to the border with the Russian Federation”. The SMM further reminds that its monitoring of this area has already been limited due to the refusal of Russian occupation authorities to ensure security guarantees for new forward patrol bases and lift “direct impediments in disregard of the SMM’s mandate”. Such behavior of the Russian side is prompted by attempts to hide illegal activities as exemplified by the recent case, registered by the SMM, of fresh tracks of heavy trucks on a road leading towards the border with Russia near Kuznetsy where there is no international border crossing point present. In those cases when the SMM patrols are allowed by the Russian fighters to stay for at least several minutes at border crossing points, the traffic is blocked by the Russian side: in Izvaryne, as reported by the Mission, “the SMM observed vehicles queuing but no traffic crossing the border before being told to leave the area”.

Since signing of the Minsk agreements, we have not witnessed any good faith of the Russian Federation towards implementation of undertaken commitments, in particular regarding the freedom of movement and access of the SMM to verify compliance. As the SMM belongs to all 57 participating States, we strongly urge Russia to remove the impediments for the SMM activities and take measures for full safety of the monitors in Russia-occupied parts of Donbas.

Mr. Chairperson,

The lives of civilian population in the territories of Ukraine temporarily occupied by Russia continue to be severely impacted by irresponsible behavior of the Russian occupation administration. For two years now the Russian side has denied the opening of an entry-exit checkpoint in Zolote, which would ease the movement of people in Luhansk region in addition to the only existing checkpoint in Stanytsia Luhanska. Last Friday, President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko visited the Zolote checkpoint. He underlined that the Ukrainian side had done everything possible to equip it with the passport control points and fiscal service points, to provide mobile banking at the checkpoint, so that pensioners from the occupied territory could come and receive pensions and purchase affordable foodstuffs. Now it depends only on the Russian side whether the civilians in Luhansk region could be relieved of at least some of their hardships. We urge the Russian Federation to deliver upon the arrangements reached within the TCG and enable the opening of Zolote entry-exit checkpoint without delay.

Mr. Chairperson,

This week, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights released its regular Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine, this time for the period of 16 November to 15 February 2018. As the access of the OHCHR to Crimea was again denied by the Russian occupation administration, the Office had to monitor the human rights situation in Crimea from mainland Ukraine and through regular fact-finding missions to areas adjacent to Crimea, including the administrative boundary line with the peninsula. This is the mechanism of monitoring which should be used by all three OSCE Institutions within their respective mandates and by the OSCE SMM, which are also denied entry to the peninsula by the occupation authorities.

The OHCHR reiterated persistent problems in the administration of justice and the enjoyment of fundamental freedoms in Crimea, especially of freedoms of peaceful assembly, opinion and expression, and education in native language. For instance, the number of students taught in the Ukrainian language in Crimea has drastically decreased, falling by 97 per cent since 2014, from almost 13 thousand to slightly more than three hundred students. The report also confirmed the forced conscription taking place in Crimea in violation of international humanitarian law: at least 4,800 men were compelled into Russian armed forces in 2017.

We insist that the Russian Federation must comply with its international obligations as an occupying power in Crimea, and ensure due human rights protection and unimpeded access of human rights monitoring missions and NGOs. We call upon Russia to immediately release all political prisoners convicted by the Russian occupation administration on fabricated charges, including Ukrainian citizen Volodymyr Balukh who this week announced an open-ended hunger strike in protest against his unjust imprisonment.

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 for its obligations under international law, for the OSCE principles and commitments.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.