



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 1303rd meeting of the Permanent Council
18 February 2021

Madam Chairperson,

Last week's discussions in the OSCE Permanent Council and the UN Security Council have clearly demonstrated that Russia's denial of its role as a party to the conflict it had initiated against Ukraine almost 7 years ago remains the main obstacle to its peaceful political resolution.

Propaganda statements and initiatives, such as the most recent draft PC Declaration proposed by the Russian delegation, deceive no one. Russia is a party and signatory to the "Normandie Four" and the Trilateral Contact Group. In the first case, Germany and France are mediators, while in the latter one, the OSCE serves as a mediator. The concept of so-called "co-mediator", to which the Russian delegation often refers during the PC meetings, is absurd. There are no "co-mediators", this is simply another element of Russia's massive campaign of disinformation and avoiding responsibility for non-fulfilment of its obligations as a party to the conflict.

Faced with coordinated stance by the international community, the Russian side continues to resort to violence in Donbas and persecute the dissenting voices in Crimea. It hopes that Ukraine will give in to this blackmail tactics and launches so-called "direct dialogue" with Russia's occupation administrations in Donetsk and Luhansk, leaving the Russian government in a comfortable position behind the backs of these illegal structures.

During his working visit to the line of contact in Donbas on 11 February, President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy stressed that in recent weeks the number of ceasefire violations has increased, which is linked to the attempts to put pressure on the Ukrainian side in the consultations held by the Trilateral Contact Group. On that day, two Ukrainian servicemen were killed by the Russian armed formations, one by machine gun fire and another one by sniper fire. Fragility of the security situation in Donbas was clear to Ambassadors of Canada, France, Germany, Sweden, the UK and the US, who joined President Zelenskyy during his visit.

The recent SMM reports confirm this fact as well. While the overall number of ceasefire violations remains comparatively low, the spikes of violence can take place at any time. On 11 February, the Mission registered 848 violations of ceasefire in the Russia-occupied parts of Donbas, close to the Donetsk Filtration Station and Sofiivka, which were assessed as live-fire training exercises in the security zone, in violation of the respective TCG decision. This is a clear and deliberate affront to the TCG and decisions taken within its framework on this track. We strongly condemn Russia's disregard for safety of the DFS personnel ensuring water supplies to hundreds of thousands of civilians on the both sides of the line of contact.

The Russian side demonstrates its readiness to escalate the situation further whenever it deems it necessary. Last week, all 43 Minsk-proscribed weapons in violation of their withdrawal lines were spotted by the SMM in the temporarily occupied parts of Donbas. Predominant majority of the heavy weapons (111 out of 126) outside designated storage sites were also registered in those areas.

As reiterated many times before, these numbers would be significantly higher if the Russian armed formations did not restrict SMM patrols and attack its technical assets. The OSCE was asked to monitor implementation of the security provisions of the Minsk agreements. For almost 7 years, Russia has been preventing the SMM from doing that. Lifting such restrictions, especially in the areas adjacent to the uncontrolled segment of the Ukrainian-Russian state border and in southern part of the Donetsk region, would be a direct indication of Russia's decision to start real resolution of the conflict. Until now, we haven't observed necessary political will by the Russian side.

The most recent TCG meeting on 16–17 February, again, hasn't brought any substantial results. The Russian delegation continues to refuse finalizing arrangements on demining, new disengagement areas and the next stage of mutual release of detainees. The checkpoints of the Russian armed formations near Zolote and Shchastia remain closed, while others keep operating in a very limited mode, denying civilians the possibility to meet their families, receive social payments and administrative services.

In the temporarily occupied Crimea, the Russian side again demonstrates no political will to stop its pressure on Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians, and to start genuine dialogue on de-occupation of peninsula. The number of Ukrainian citizens persecuted on ethnic, religious, political or other grounds only grows. Yesterday, on 17 February, 7 houses of Crimean Tatars were searched, and 6 persons were detained by the Russian occupiers without any legal grounds or presence of lawyers. The occupying Power continues its policy of intimidating local population in Crimea, which, along with changing the demographic structure in Crimea, serves the purpose of further integration of Ukrainian peninsula into Russia's political, mental and military space.

We are approaching the next sad anniversary of Russia's illegal occupation and attempted annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. In this regard, we will raise an additional current issue at the next meeting of the Permanent Council. At this moment, let me draw your attention to the Appeal by The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, adopted on 16 February by Constitutional majority of 314 votes, to international organizations, governments and parliaments of the foreign states on condemning the occupation of Crimea and on the release of Ukrainian political prisoners. In it, the Ukrainian Parliament, in particular, demands from the Russian Federation to ensure unrestricted and proper access of established international human rights organizations to the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. In this vein, we remind the Russian side of unacceptability of its policy of denying access of the SMM to the temporarily occupied Crimean peninsula, which would be able to provide participating States with the verified information on the situation on the ground.

We, again, urge the Russian Federation to reverse its illegal occupation of Crimea, militarization of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, and to stop its aggression against Ukraine, including by withdrawing its armed formations, mercenaries and their hardware from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and fully implementing its commitments under the Minsk agreements.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.