



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 1344th meeting of the Permanent Council
11 November 2021

Madam Chairperson,

The security situation in certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions raises serious concerns.

At every meeting of the Permanent Council, we speak about the increase of the ceasefire violations. This meeting is no exception.

These military offensives and artillery and mortar attacks by the Russian armed formations continue to be sustained by constant flow of Russian weaponry and ammunition through the uncontrolled part of the Ukrainian-Russian state border as well as by the unwillingness of Moscow to sit at the negotiation table.

Due to Russia's reluctance to deliver on its commitments and obligations as the signatory of the Minsk agreements, the civilians on the ground are especially affected. While burden on them is still high, continued ceasefire violations place additional challenges before them, since winter is approaching.

The passing week was further marked with new civilian objects being hit with hostile fire.

On the 7th November, Svitlychne (Nyzhnie-1) settlement in the Luhansk region was shelled with Minsk-proscribed 122-mm artillery. As a result, critical infrastructure was damaged, including Popasna water pipeline facilities and gas pipeline. This affects people on the both side of the contact line.

Apart from that, settlement Bolotene, next to Stanytsia Luhanska, was under fire twice in a week. Shelling with the use of 120 mm mortars left one residential building destroyed and electric transmission line damaged.

Bolotene settlement also is a place where Russian UAV flying over positions of the Ukrainian Armed Forces was shot down on the 6th November. The explosion that followed proved that the drone was carrying munition. This case was reported by the SMM in its spot report.

Further, on the 7th November SMM again observed a non-SMM UAV flying over a residential area of Hranitne.

These cases recorded by the SMM is an emblematic illustration of how the Russian armed formations have intensified the use of drones, including to drop VOG-17 shells over the Ukrainian positions and to conduct distance mining. Such indiscriminate attacks are forbidden under IHL as they create additional risks to the civilians, while the demining plan is pending its finalization.

However, it also further restricts operational capabilities of the SMM. Ambassador Cevik was very clear, when addressing this Council on the 7th October. People on the ground are frightened. They never know what drones are bringing to them. Consequently, this makes the civilians uneasy about the flights of the SMM UAVs as well.

That's not to mention permanent jamming the SMM assets are facing. As reported by the SMM, out of the 73 flights of mid-range UAVs, conducted between

21 July and 30 September, 66 per cent of them were affected by GPS signal interference, which represents a 16 per cent increase compared with the previous period.

In addition to that, last week, the EECP Zolote came under fire of the Russian armed formations. Later, on the 5 November, the SMM, inside the disengagement area near Zolote, observed three craters. Well, should I remind to the Russian delegation about reconnaissance the Russian armed formations were conducting in the area in October?

Unfortunately, this shelling further undermines people's confidence about their safety while crossing the contact line. In the meantime, over the last week the passage through Stanytsia Luhanska EECP decreased by 20%. And as the last TCG meeting demonstrated, Russia continues suggesting new and new conditions for the opening of two additional EECPs in Zolote and Shchastia, despite the fact that they were to be operational a year ago starting from 10 November. Would be the Russian delegation so kind to explain why it continues keeping Ukrainians as hostages in the occupied territories?

It is also unacceptable that the presence in Zolote disengagement area of the members of the Russian armed formations – wearing an armband with “JCCC” written on it – is misused to deny the Mission's passage into the area citing “the road is not open for the SMM”.

The inability of the Mission to access vital transport routes is unacceptable. We call upon the Russian Federation to provide the SMM patrols with unimpeded access to the roads, which is of particular importance for the safety of monitors.

These restrictions imposed by the Russian armed formations continues to affect directly the SMM's ability to patrol and conduct operations freely across the contact line, and especially in the border areas.

As reported by the SMM, between 21 July and 30 September, the Mission's freedom of movement was restricted 15 times in the border areas in Luhansk region and 11 times in Donetsk region.

No doubts, these denials, closure of roads, jamming, security checks etc are intended to significantly restrict the ability of the SMM to detect all weaponry in violation of the withdrawal lines and illegal military activities in the occupied territories.

However, even those limited numbers of munition observed by the SMM under such challenging circumstances give us general understanding about the scale of violations in the occupied territories. For instance, on 31 October, the SMM observed outside designated storages – 25 tanks, 74 armoured combat vehicles and 12 towed artilleries near Buhaivka; 31 tanks near Kruhlyk; 27 tanks, 31 howitzers and field guns and 84 armoured combat vehicles near Myrne. All in the occupied Luhansk region.

On the 5 November, the SMM spotted 52 tanks, 13 MLRS, 4 self-propelled howitzers and 3 mortars near Ternove, Donetsk region. Among these weaponry, 122mm MLRS Grad-K was detected for the first time. This type is used only by the Russian armed forces.

Can we imagine what would be the real numbers if the SMM is provided with full and unhindered access to the occupied territories?

In this regard, a three-year field investigation of weapon supplies into Donetsk and Luhansk published by Conflict Armament Research last week is also telling.

The evidence confirms that the Russian Federation produced most of the ammunition and nearly all weapons used by the illegal armed formations in the occupied territories, from assault rifles and precision rifles, grenade launchers, precision-guided munitions, and landmines to anti-tank guided weapons. The findings also indicate weapons previously captured by Russian forces, such as anti-aircraft missiles seized in Georgia in 2008. In addition, among the findings is the deployment of a fleet of Russian-made drones in Ukraine that I have already mentioned.

But would be distinguished delegations surprised to hear from the Russian delegation once again denial of Russia's responsibility for the ongoing conflict?

Excellencies,

While the SMM is restricted in performing its operation in the occupied territories and Russia masses its troops on the border with Ukraine, Moscow once again declined a joint proposal to arrange a ministerial meeting in the Normandy format. This meeting could be held today, on 11 November, if Russia had agreed.

We believe that the essence of diplomacy is to ease the tension and to test the waters for a way forward. However, the principle “take it or leave it” advocated by Moscow is about ultimatums not compromises.

On the other hand, Russia’s reluctance to engage into diplomatic and political contacts further raises concerns about its military activities in the border areas. Russia’s explanations, provided so far since April, are totally unconvincing. And escalatory rhetoric of the Russian leadership is even more worrying, as it indicates that military plans have always been kept on the table in the Kremlin. That’s why clear and strong political messages are needed to demotivate Russia from any further destructive actions.

Finally, we call upon the Russian Federation to be cooperative and constructive. People residing in the occupied regions deserve peace long ago, as Europe deserves stability.

In this regard, in order to improve the transparency, we urge the Russian Federation to provide necessary security assurances to open forward patrol basis in border areas, as well as to resume the FPB operation in Debaltsevo.

Permanent monitoring and verification of the Ukrainian-Russian state border together with the creation of a security area in the border regions of Ukraine and the Russian Federation, as provided for in the Minsk protocol, would be also an important step forward.

It is also necessary to create a new subgroup in the TCG that would focus on the issue of border, as it was suggested by Ukraine on numerous occasions.

Steps on the humanitarian track would be a gesture of good will, as well. We call upon the Russian Federation not to politicize but to intensify the TCG work, including on the release of detainees, ensuring normal functioning of the EECs along the contact line, finalization of demining plan and for new disengagement areas.

Distinguished colleagues,

The last but not least. Occupied Crimea has to be high on OSCE radars.

In addition to previously fabricated charges, another one of smuggling an explosive device has been brought against Nariman Dzhelial. Absurdity of the punitive case trumped up against Nariman, Asan and Aziz Akhtemov is obvious.

Over the last months Russia has intensified repressive campaign in Crimea. To that end Russia effectively uses COVID pandemic to suppress human rights, including the right to peaceful assembly, freedom of movement and freedom of speech.

On the other hand, military indoctrination keeps its momentum. Those who oppose are prosecuted. As of October, there were 271 criminal cases for draft evasion in Crimea. In 259 cases, the sentences were passed. 12 cases are still under consideration.

Therefore, 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.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.