



**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 1213<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Permanent Council,  
24 January 2018

**Mr. Chairperson,**

I wish to start by emphasising the importance of focused attention attached by the Slovak OSCE Chairmanship to dealing with the current biggest threat to European security and the rules-based order - the ongoing Russia's aggression against Ukraine and illegal occupation of Crimea. Visiting Ukraine last week, the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Minister Miroslav Lajčák was able to see first-hand the most serious security, socio-economic and humanitarian challenges confronting the Ukrainian state and Ukrainian citizens as a result of external aggression, which will soon enter its sixth year. Consistent involvement of the OSCE together with other international organizations and actors is necessary to motivate the aggressor state towards politico-diplomatic resolution of the conflict, fully respecting the norms and principles of international law, as well as for timely mitigation of its consequences. We must be always aware that what is called "the contact line" in Donbas emerged as a result of Russia's military invasion into the Ukrainian territory and glaring disregard for the states' borders. This is where advance of Russian troops was stopped by the Ukrainian army and the Ukrainian people with support and solidarity of our international partners. The OSCE toolbox has a variety of instruments to offer, but their use is impeded by Russia's continuing reluctance to recognize its role and responsibilities as a party to the conflict, thus placing significant obstacles to be it monitoring of security situation or addressing flagrant violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the Russia-occupied parts of Ukraine. We will continue to support the Chairmanship's efforts to alleviate suffering of people living in conflict-affected areas by tackling their needs and security concerns. At the same time, five years since the start of the Russian aggression and military invasion into the territory of Ukraine convince that comprehensive resolution of those enormous challenges will only be possible when the Russian Federation takes a political decision to stop its aggression, to cease hostilities and to withdraw its Armed Forces and armed formations from the sovereign territory of Ukraine. It is critically important to work

towards making it happen, including by increasing the costs for Russia of its aggression and blatant breach of basic norms of international law.

In Donbas, the very first provision of the Minsk agreements, that is ceasefire, is yet to be implemented. Unfortunately, the developments on the ground, confirmed by the SMM reports, indicate that the most recent recommitment to a permanent ceasefire agreed within the TCG fell short of its goal. The Russian armed formations continue their attacks, and the civilians continue to suffer. The Russian occupation of parts of Ukraine's territory forces thousands of people to wait daily in long queues to cross the contact line. There is not a single crossing point for vehicles in the Luhansk region and the Russian side blocks the opening of such crossing point in Zolote, where the infrastructure was ready since 2016.

In the Russia-occupied border areas of Ukraine, including the southern part of Donetsk region, Russia continues its campaign of intimidation directed at the SMM and its assets. At the border railway station in Voznesenivka, where a week ago SMM spotted dozens of cargo wagons and train wagons loaded with coal, travelling towards the border with the Russian Federation, the Russian fighters urged the SMM monitors to leave immediately after they reached the station. Near Chermalyk, they fired at an SMM mini-UAV while it was registering "two military-type positions, assessed as belonging to the armed formations". Near Sofiivka, the Russian fighters have directly warned the SMM that they had the instructions from their superiors to shoot down any SMM UAV they will spot. This is the indication that Russia opts for further escalation. The intimidation, harassment and attacks on the SMM would only be continued if they were approved by the Russian side. What we see is the continuation of Russian strategy of "blinding" the SMM. According to the SMM, in the last five weeks the SMM monitors encountered 44 non-mine related restrictions to freedom of movement and access - 90% of them in Russia-occupied parts of Donbas. Noone was taken to account for downing an SMM long-range UAV on 27 October last year, no financial compensation by Russia followed, no explanations were provided by Moscow regarding registered military convoys crossing the Russian-Ukrainian state border. It is important that, despite systematic restriction at the border, the SMM takes consistent efforts to do its monitoring job. On 17 January at the border crossing point near Uspenka, it was able to register 64 covered cargo trucks with trailers and five trucks with liquid-tanks exiting Ukraine; the next day, it saw 81 covered cargo trucks in a queue to exit Ukraine. Even these numbers, registered in one border checkpoint during two short stays lasting only one hour, highlight the scale of illegal trade or movement of assets across the border regularly maintained by the Russian Federation. Russia's obstruction does not allow us to have a full picture from the SMM reporting.

In the Russia-occupied Crimea, grave human rights violations against people expressing pro-Ukrainian views and Crimean Tatars criticizing occupation continue, as indicated by the recent Human Rights Watch World Report 2019. Despite the Order issued by the International Court of Justice in the case "Ukraine against Russia" that the Russian Federation must ensure the availability of education in the Ukrainian language, the number of students in Crimea in classes with Ukrainian as the language of instruction plummeted from 12.7 thousand in 2014 to three hundred in 2018, as referred to in the same HRW report. The Russian occupation authorities

continue to repress Ukrainian activists and Crimean Tatars. Tomorrow, another so called “court” session will take place in the case of Volodymyr Balukh who was sentenced last year for hoisting a Ukrainian flag near his private house. Crimean Tatar Edem Bekirov, a disabled person facing fabricated charges of storage and transfer of explosives and ammunition, has been denied a proper medical assistance.

In the Russian Federation, dozens of Ukrainian citizens continue to be illegally held in custody as hostages of the Kremlin regime. Among them are Ukrainian filmmaker Oleg Sentsov, journalist Roman Sushchenko, Oleksandr Kolchenko and many others, including Pavlo Hryb who is again taken today to a Russian show of court hearing. We urge the Russian authorities to immediately release the illegally detained Ukrainian citizens.

We reiterate Ukraine’s proposal, repeatedly expressed in the Trilateral contact group, to exchange 23 Russian citizens, who committed crimes in Ukraine against Ukraine, for Ukrainian citizens who have been taken hostage by the Russian Federation.

**Mr. Chairperson,**

Right after the armed attack of the Russian forces on the Ukrainian Naval Forces vessels in neutral waters near the Kerch strait on 25 November 2018 and the seizure of crew and boats, the overwhelming majority of the OSCE participating States have demanded from Russia the immediate and unconditional release of the captured Ukrainian servicemen. These demands were also voiced clearly at the OSCE Ministerial Council in Milan. In particular, the OSCE Quadriga statement of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Italy, Slovakia, Austria and Albania of 7 December 2018 reads: “we called on Russian Federation to return the vessels and their crew unconditionally and without delay”. Today, nearly two months after the Russian attack, the 24 Ukrainian servicemen remain in Russia’s captivity as prisoners of war. The Russian Federation defies the calls of the international community and defies its international obligations on the treatment of prisoners of war. The Russian authorities do not provide any official information on the state of health of 3 wounded servicemen and rendered medical assistance. Relatives of the servicemen are not allowed to meet with them or have a telephone conversation. We again urge Russia to immediately and unconditionally release them. We urge to allow to provide independent medical assistance to the wounded Ukrainian sailors.

The actions of the Russian authorities do require that the international community steps up its pressure on Russia, including by strengthening the sanctions regime, to contain its aggressiveness and make it abide by its international commitments and obligations.

We again urge the Russian Federation to reverse its illegal occupation of Crimea 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.

**Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.**