



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 1255th meeting of the Permanent Council,
16 January 2020

Mr. Chairperson,

The delegation of Ukraine expresses its gratitude to all participating States, which raised the issue of Russia's ongoing aggression and the necessity to restore Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within the internationally recognized borders in the last meeting of the Permanent Council with participation of Chairperson-in-Office Edi Rama. Resolution of this conflict remains critical for restoring respect for the OSCE core principles flagrantly violated by the Russian Federation and returning the climate of trust and mutual cooperation within our Organization.

The first step in this direction, that is establishment of comprehensive and sustainable ceasefire in Donbas, remains unimplemented despite the highest political level commitments confirmed by Russia and Ukraine during the Normandy Four Summit in Paris. The end of 2019 and beginning of 2020 have not brought an end to shellings and casualties along the contact line: the SMM noted in its weekly report of 8 January "no significant changes in the number of ceasefire violations recorded". Already on 1 January, a Ukrainian serviceman was wounded. Since the beginning of 2020, only in two weeks, the number of Ukraine's military casualties in Donbas reached 3 killed and 18 wounded. As ceasefire violations continue, we see no readiness by Russia and its illegal armed formations in Donbas to stop violence. Moreover, the regular use of the Minsk-proscribed weapons by the Russian proxies indicates further plans of Kremlin to sustain violence until its political demands are not fulfilled by Ukraine. This blackmailing tactic has been in place in the last six years, no matter how much Ukraine demonstrated its willingness to end the Russia-initiated conflict in a peaceful politico-diplomatic way.

We thank the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine for its constant vigilance in highlighting Russia's illegal military activities in the occupied parts of Donbas. In the town of Debaltseve, a major railway hub captured by Russia in February 2015, the Mission observed dozens of tanks and armoured personnel carriers loaded on cargo trains. In Miusynsk and Khrustalnyi, the SMM confirmed dozens of heavy weapons

stored by the Russian armed formations. Howitzers, mortars and multiple launch rocket systems violating the agreed withdrawal lines were spotted near Bile, Pikuzy and Novoamvrosiivske. This violates the Minsk agreements, commitment to which was reiterated by Russia and Ukraine during the N4 Summit. Ukraine's position in this regard has been very clear from the very beginning and it remains in place: there can be no further progress in political settlement until the necessary security environment is established.

Reaching this goal requires a comprehensive monitoring by the SMM, which must have the possibility to work freely and safely. We fully share the Mission's view that its freedom of movement is "critical to the implementation of its mandate, including the fulfilment of its role in monitoring and facilitating the implementation of the security aspects of the Minsk agreements". In this connection, we strongly condemn Russia's persistent practice of restricting and impeding the SMM freedom of movement. In three weeks, which followed the last regular meeting of the Permanent Council, the monitors registered 65 non-mine-related restrictions, all but one of which occurred in Russia-occupied parts of Donbas. Needless to say, the number of reported ceasefire violations and Minsk-proscribed weapons used by the Russian armed formations would be considerably higher, if those restrictions were lifted.

Monitoring of the security situation in the night remains particularly problematic. Due to the security concerns, the ground patrols can not move freely in Russia-occupied parts of Donbas, which undermines the Mission's ability to observe ceasefire violations. Even so, about 55 per cent of all of them are recorded, as informed by the SMM itself, during night-time hours, primarily by SMM cameras and monitoring officers stationed in forward patrol bases. If we wish to ensure comprehensive observation 24/7, we should enhance the Mission's technical capacities to do that. In this connection, the delegation of Ukraine reiterates the need to provide adequate increase of resources for the next SMM budget to be adopted until the end of March. We count on participating States to let this happen.

Implementation of other arrangements reached in Paris last December remains under consideration within the Trilateral Contact Group, including during its today's meeting. The Ukrainian side continues meanwhile fulfilling its commitments in those issues, which do not require agreement with the Russian side. For instance, on 22 December last year, amendments to the Law of Ukraine on Pre-trial Detention entered into force. These amendments ensure unimpeded access of the ICRC to the detained persons, without restriction as to the number and duration of such visits, in the cases and according to the provisions of the 1949 Geneva Conventions for the Protection of War Victims. We expect the Russian side to grant full and unconditional access to all detained persons for the international organisations including the ICRC in Russia-occupied parts of Donbas, in accordance with the N4 common agreed conclusions of 9 December 2019.

Another Russia-occupied part of Ukraine's territory, Crimea, remains a matter of major concern. Crimean peninsula continues to be used by Russia as a staging ground for the ongoing militarization of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov region. Last Thursday, on 9 January, Russian President made another illegal visit to Ukraine's Crimea without the consent of the Ukrainian government with the aim to observe Russia's military drills taking place off the coast of the occupied peninsula.

Violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms by the occupying Power continue unabated in Crimea. On 13 January, a Crimean Solidarity activist Gulsum Alieva was detained by the Russian security service at the administrative boundary line between Crimea and Kherson region of Ukraine while trying to cross it, and released only after several hours of illegal detention. She is the daughter of Crimean Tatar political prisoner Muslim Aliev “sentenced” one month earlier by a Russian occupation court under fabricated charges to 19 years imprisonment despite the lack of any evidence that he has either committed a crime or planned to do so. This represents a well-established Russia’s practice to persecute families of political prisoners, their lawyers and NGOs to intimidate any dissenting voices. Silence and obedience: those are pillars of Russia’s efforts to build “Potemkin village” in the occupied Crimea. We strongly condemn these efforts and call upon the OSCE and its assets to remain seized of this matter.

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 from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and fully implementing its commitments under the Minsk agreements.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.