



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International
Organizations in Vienna

Statement in response to the CiO Special Representative in Ukraine and the TCG Heidi Grau and the SMM Chief Monitor Yasar Halit Cevik

As delivered by Ambassador Yevhenii Tsymbaliuk,
Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,
to the 1310th meeting of the Permanent Council
22 April 2021

Mr. Chairperson,

We join other delegations in welcoming CiO Special Representative Heidi Grau and SMM Chief Monitor Halit Cevik back to the Permanent Council.

Your presentations, **Ambassadors**, were useful and timely, as we continue to witness deteriorating security situation along the Ukrainian-Russian state border, in the parts of Ukraine temporarily occupied by Russia, and in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov.

Russia's significant military build-up, the recent restrictions to the passage of vessels along the Crimea coast in the Black Sea and announcements of airspace closure in the area pose direct additional security threat to Ukraine. These hostile actions have been noted by the entire international community and drawn to the spotlight of the OSCE during last weeks. The refusal to comply with the provisions of the Vienna document 2011, demonstrated by the Russian side, has only confirmed deliberate character of its malicious actions. In these circumstances, we rely in particular on the OSCE mechanisms of conflict prevention and mediation, the TCG and the SMM being at the forefront of these endeavours.

The SMM findings remain a valuable source of information on the developments on the ground, which allow to debunk Russia's false narratives. For instance, we thank the SMM for its efforts to increase monitoring and verification of heavy weapons holding areas and permanent storage sites even as the overall number of patrols had to be reduced due to the COVID-19 prevention measures. Because of that, we know that 94% of the Minsk-proscribed heavy weapons were stationed in the Russia-occupied parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine, clearly indicating which side was really preparing to attack.

The growing number of ceasefire violations reported by the SMM, which increased almost twofold even during the reporting period, that is before the latest developments, has demonstrated the seriousness of situation along the line of contact to participating States. Despite Ukraine's efforts to abide by the ceasefire, we have seen the raising toll among Ukrainian servicemen, in large part caused by targeted sniper fire from Russian positions.

We continue to count upon international mediation of our negotiations with Russia on the peaceful politico-diplomatic resolution of the conflict, both within “Normandie Four” and the TCG. Recent contacts, high level meetings, visits and expert talks were all directed at reaching this goal. We are grateful to both speakers today for their dedicated work in the TCG.

We regret that Russia keeps its destructive stance. As reiterated on 20 April by President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy in his appeal on the security situation, both in the “Normandie Four” format, and in the TCG, the Russian side refused to support the joint statement on the need to return to a comprehensive ceasefire. We still hope the draft addendum to the additional measures to strengthen ceasefire, which was substantially discussed this Tuesday in the TCG Working Group on Security Issues, would be finalized in the coming days.

The discussions of the last weeks in the PC meetings made it abundantly clear that the Russian side takes any further progress on security, humanitarian and political issues dependent on Ukraine’s consent to legitimize the Russian proxies as a party to the conflict. This will not happen. We urge the Russian side to accept it and to unblock such long overdue tasks as demining, opening of additional EECs, release of detainees and new disengagement areas. We also remind the Russian side of the need not to undermine the progress already achieved. In particular, no personnel, weapons, mines or even containers should be present within the existing disengagement areas. We call on the SMM to continue close monitoring of these areas and report on any violations registered.

We understand the challenges, which the Mission faces in the Russia-occupied parts of Donbas. In the reporting period, 93% of restrictions to the SMM freedom of movement took place in those areas, severely undermining the Mission’s capability to fulfil its mandate. We condemn Russia’s policy of imposing further restrictions, such as new requirement for the SMM vehicles to pass visual inspection of trunks at the checkpoints of the Russian armed formations, or the most recent installation without permission of two cameras on the mast of the SMM camera system at the Oktiabr mine, spotted by the Mission on 19 April. This adds to the already existing serious impediments, which force the SMM to function as three separate entities.

We urge Russia to lift all restrictions to the Mission’s activities, and to allow its full and safe access to all temporarily occupied parts of Ukraine’s territory, including in Crimea and along the state border with Russia.

Monitoring of the border areas has become even more critical now, when we witness the ongoing military build-up by Russia, which denies it and pretends that nothing unusual happens. During his recent phone talks with OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Ann Linde and Secretary General Helga Schmid, Minister Kuleba stressed the importance of opening additional SMM forward patrol bases along the uncontrolled segment of the border. This was also mentioned by participating States as one of the recommendations following the special joint FSC-PC meeting convened according to the Vienna Document 2011 on the Confidence- and Security-Building Measures. Russia’s consent to provide security guarantees in the occupied areas of Donbas, necessary for opening such FPBs, would serve as a litmus test of its readiness to proceed to de-escalation.

We appreciate that the SMM, faced with numerous restrictions to its monitoring of the security situation on the ground, continued to pay proper

attention to Russia's violations of Ukraine's sovereignty in the occupied territories. The Mission's Report includes such glaring cases as new so-called "customs" requirements introduced by the members of the Russian armed formations in the Luhansk region since 18 February, so-called "regulations" on detention issued in the Donetsk region, which are very similar to the Russian Law of 1995, and threats of sanctions for the so-called "limitations of the use of Russian as a state language" in Luhansk region. Russian customs, Russian laws and Russian language – those are facts established by the SMM, which confirm that Russia had occupied parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine, violating Ukraine's sovereignty.

Tomorrow, we will mark another sad anniversary of the tragic incident, which took place in 2017 near the Russia-occupied village of Pryshyb. We pay tribute to the memory of the US SMM paramedic Joseph Stone, who lost his life in the line of duty.

I wish to finish my statement today by two very specific requests to the SMM for its activities in the forthcoming weeks. First, we expect the Mission to return to its previous practice of informing participating States on the socio-economic consequences of impediments to the freedom of navigation in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, imposed by the Russian Federation. This became very urgent and relevant after Russia's most recent illegal decision to restrict parts of the Black Sea, including in the direction of the Kerch Strait. Second, let me reiterate the request expressed in the last PC meeting a week ago to verify the recent media reports on the forced conscription taking place in the occupied areas of the Donetsk region.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.