



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 Ihor Prokopchuk,
Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,
to the 1221st meeting of the Permanent Council,
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Mr. Chairperson,

Alongside security issues, the dire humanitarian consequences of the Russian aggression in Donbas affecting Ukraine's population under the Russian occupation, have been the subject of constant attention of the Permanent Council for many months and now years. This also includes the hardships facing the Ukrainian citizens while crossing the contact line – the line where the Ukrainian Armed Forces stopped the advance of Russian military units in Donbas. So far the efforts to alleviate the plight of civilians were undermined by Russia's reluctance to meet its obligations as a party to the conflict and a signatory of the Minsk agreements.

Last week Ukraine has formally informed the Russian MFA, as well as Germany and France as mediators in the N4, about Ukraine's readiness and intention to open Zolote entry-exit checkpoint and to start unilaterally the repairs of the broken pedestrian bridge crossing near Stanytsia Luhanska EECP. We would remind that respective arrangements date back to over 2 years ago, the N4 Berlin Summit at the level of Heads of State and Government in October 2016, but their practical implementation was stalled by unconstructive behaviour of the Russian side. We regret that again the Russian Federation did not accommodate the requests on ensuring the ceasefire regime and granting security guarantees, demining the part of Zolote EECP and withdrawing its armed formations at the bridge crossing near Stanytsia Luhanska to comply with the contact line agreed the Minsk Memorandum of 2014. On 24 March the SMM reported that it "did not see any civilians passing the checkpoint to proceed further south" as the checkpoint of the Russian armed formations on the southern edge of Zolote disengagement area remained closed. Moreover, "at this checkpoint as well as that of the armed formations south of the Stanytsia Luhanska bridge, the SMM observed laminated signs warning people

against crossing the line of contact in the Zolote area due to “security concerns”. Thus, instead of proceeding towards opening an additional crossing point in the Luhansk region, the Russian side opted for the usual practice of intimidation of civilians. No security guarantees were provided for repairs in Stanytsia Luhanska. Unfortunately, the Russian side again showcased its dismissal of the needs of the local population, leaving the wooden broken bridge near Stanytsia Luhanska as the only way for crossing the contact line in the Luhansk region for thousands of people moving daily between its government-controlled and Russia-occupied parts. We condemn such stance of the Russian Federation and the contempt for the needs of the people. We are confident that the Slovak Chairmanship and the entire OSCE community have to sharpen the focus on stimulating Russia towards much-needed improvements in the living conditions of the conflict-affected population in Donbas. Russia and its occupation administration must deliver on applicable responsibilities in conformity with the international humanitarian law.

Regrettably, instead of responsible behaviour, the Russian Federation continues to demonstrate unwillingness to cease violence. In the wake of “the shortest-lived re-commitment to ceasefire in Donbas since June 2017”, the Russian armed formations carried out 73 attacks, including 51 with the use of Minsk-proscribed weapons. Between 8-24 March, these attacks left 6 Ukrainian servicemen killed and 18 wounded. The Russian forces continue to stage provocations for propaganda purposes aiming to blame Ukrainian servicemen, as were the cases with the damage to functioning schools in Donetsk City and Holmivskyi reported by the SMM on 23 March. Both schools, damaged by bullets, are located 3.5km and 2.2km respectively from the contact line, in the midst of residential buildings, which excludes the possibility of small arms fire from the government-controlled areas. No surprise that the school staff “refused to answer any further questions without permission from senior members of the armed formations” and the SMM monitors were not allowed to enter the school. We strongly condemn this and other restrictions imposed in the Russia-occupied parts of Donbas which prevent the SMM from establishing facts on the ground in accordance with the mandate agreed by all OSCE participating States.

As in the past, the high level of violence is sustained by the continuing flows of Russia’s supplies to its armed formations in Donbas. In one month between 10 February to 10 March 2019, these supplies included 107 cisterns of fuel and lubricants, and 21 wagons of ammunition. Such supplies continue uninterrupted: on 21 March, while at the Chervona Mohyla railway station in Voznesenivka, the SMM saw at least 100 wagons stationary with the contents not visible. Notably, after about five minutes, two armed members of the Russian armed formations told the SMM to leave the area. We insist that the Russian side must remove all these restrictions and enable transparency and verification by the SMM, including at the Russia-controlled segment of the Ukrainian-Russian state border, in accordance with the Minsk agreements and the Mission’s mandate. For now, the Russian Federation remains in serious breach of its commitments.

Mr. Chairperson,

Non-compliance of Russia with its commitments remains a key obstacle to the peaceful resolution of the conflict which requires implementation of the Minsk agreements and de-occupation of Crimea. Instead of withdrawing its armed formations, military equipment, as well as mercenaries from the territory of Ukraine under the OSCE monitoring and verification, the Russian side deploys and uses its sophisticated military equipment in the occupied territories. In particular, on 16 March the SMM again spotted an automatic jamming system “R-330Zh Zhitel”, and, for the first time, the most modern Russian radio-electronic jamming complex “Tirada-2”. This complex is specialized in disabling communication satellites; the contracts for procurement of these systems to the Russian Armed Forces were announced only last year. We again have factual evidence that the Russian military deploy to Donbas the most modern military systems.

The presence of the variety of Russian jamming and electronic warfare systems in Donbas make us recall the most recent cases of downing SMM’s long-range UAVs in Russia-occupied territory in October 2018 and February 2019, accompanied by severe jamming. We continue to expect clarifications from the Russian delegation about the deployments of these systems and the attacks which led to the loss of the SMM’s long-range UAVs.

Mr. Chairperson,

The threats posed by Russian aggression extend beyond the conflict-affected parts of Donbas. On Friday last week the Security Service of Ukraine prevented a terrorist attack when the perpetrator was attempting to plant a bomb in a metro station in Kharkiv. As reported, he was hired and paid by his Russian curators, who also procured the explosive device. We condemn the perpetration of terrorism by the Russian Federation on the Ukrainian soil and urge the Russian authorities to put an immediate end to such activities.

Mr. Chairperson,

We strongly denounce the continued attempts by the Russian Federation to legitimize the illegal occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. Two most recent high level trips, by Chairman of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly on 15 March, and by President of the Russian Federation on 18 March, were undertaken in flagrant violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty, the norms of international law, founding OSCE principles, UN GA Resolutions, as well multilateral and bilateral treaties, to which Ukraine and Russia are parties. Ukraine expressed a strong protest in connection with these trips and emphasised, in particular, that they will in no way alter the status of Crimea as an integral part of Ukraine. In this context we reiterate the importance of consistent back-up of the non-recognition policy of Russia’s attempted annexation by practical measures. In particular, the political and economic circles, as well as private persons and legal entities are to be duly advised on the proper procedure for entry into the occupied peninsula from the mainland Ukraine. Those who violate Ukraine’s respective legislation will face legal consequences, regardless of the purpose of the visit, status or alleged lack of information on the procedure for entry.

Amidst our grave concerns about Russia's militarisation of the illegally occupied peninsula posing a threat to the entire Black Sea region and beyond, we note the launch this week of a large scale military drill of the Russian Airborne Troops in Crimea, engaging over 1.500 paratroopers, 300 pieces of military hardware and aviation. The exercises earlier this year indicated preparation for transportation and deployment of nuclear weapons from the territory of Russia into the occupied peninsula. We expect the OSCE Secretary General and the Conflict Prevention Centre to closely monitor, in line with the early warning function, Russia's military activities and preparations in the occupied Crimea in order to prevent further aggressive actions of the Russian authorities.

Yesterday, as we marked the 5th anniversary since the UN GA adopted its Resolution 68/262, in which Ukraine's territorial integrity was reaffirmed within its internationally recognized borders including Crimea and Sevastopol, the Russian occupation authorities launched a new wave of persecutions of Crimean Tatars. The houses of dozens of them were searched in the city of Simpheropol and nearby districts. Reportedly, at least twenty Crimean Tatars were detained under the trumped-up charges of alleged belonging to Hizb ut-Tahrir, an organisation that is legal in Ukraine, but banned by the Russian occupation authorities. Nine of them have already been placed under arrest. Local citizens who came to support their neighbours were beaten up, the lawyers were denied access. There are reports that the Russian occupants were planting so-called "evidence" to the houses during the illegal searches to justify their conduct. Among detained are those who have been active in supporting Crimean solidarity platform. Ukraine's Foreign Ministry expressed its strong protest against this new wave of persecutions by Russia and called upon the international community to respond to it by strengthening political, economic and sanctions pressure on the aggressor-state. We appeal to the OSCE Chairmanship and the Institutions – the HCNM and ODIHR – to duly react to this latest act of large-scale repression of civilians by the Russian occupation authorities.

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.