



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 1200th meeting of the Permanent Council,
8 November 2018

Mr. Chairperson,

I will start by expressing strong condemnation of the plans of the Russian Federation to hold illegal and fake so called “elections” in the occupied territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine in an attempt to create an air of legitimacy around the new appointments in its occupation administration. In the last Permanent Council the Russian delegation alluded to what was called a “power vacuum” as a pretext for organizing this illegal exercise. Such claims have no ground and are mounted to distract attention from Russia’s determination to take further steps that sustain Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, grossly violate the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine as well as the Minsk agreements on resolution of the conflict started by Russia. The reality is that Russian authorities exert full control over the occupied territories and play a central role in any decisions or measures implemented on the ground by the established illegal structures and the Russian armed formations. As we witness no signs of the Russia’s readiness to respond to the calls by the international community and cease preparations for those fake so-called “elections”, we emphasise it for the Russian delegation that their conduct will be a flagrant breach of Russia’s own commitments under the Minsk agreements, will be a gross violation of Russia’s international obligations on respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states, will severely undermine the entire negotiations process. The Russian appointees, that will go through this sham exercise, will neither represent the local communities of the occupied parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine, nor will they become a party to the Trilateral contact group (TCG) format on implementing the Minsk agreements. The TCG will continue to include Russia and Ukraine as parties to the conflict and the OSCE as the mediator.

While there is still time, we strongly urge the Russian Federation to abandon this provocative and escalatory plan. We strongly urge the Russian authorities to instruct their occupation administration in parts of Donbas to immediately stop harassment and intimidation of the local population, in particular related to attempts to force larger turn-out in the planned illegal exercise. We urge the Russian

authorities to take a careful note of the positions expressed, in particular, by Ambassador Sajdik at the TCG meeting on Tuesday that “the holding of the so-called “elections” does not correspond either to the letter or to the spirit of the Minsk agreements”. It is very important, Mr. Chair, that today the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Italy’s Foreign Minister Enzo Moavero Milanesi expressed a clear-cut OSCE position by issuing a respective statement. He expressed extreme concern, determined that the so called “elections” run counter to the letter and the spirit of the Minsk agreements and called to contribute in order to prevent such development. The delegation of Ukraine acknowledges with appreciation that such positions have already been expressed by the overwhelming majority of the OSCE participating States and we encourage those participating States that have not yet done so to add their voices. The Russian authorities want to take us to the edge of another serious aggravation and we must do all we can to prevent it.

Mr. Chairman,

The downing the SMM long-range UAV by the Russian armed formations, which took place deep inside the Russia-occupied territory of Donbas near the Russia-controlled segment of the border, has diminished the OSCE monitoring capability that was the obvious target of the perpetrators. Telling in this regard is the SMM’s weekly report of 31 October, where again all the Minsk-proscribed weapons in the Russia-occupied areas of Donbas were registered by the SMM exclusively with the use of the UAVs. We welcome common views in this hall placing responsibility upon the Russian side for “blinding” the Mission despite its commitment among 57 participating States to ensure the free, safe, secure and unimpeded access for the OSCE monitors and their equipment. Unless the Russian Federation changes immediately its attitude towards the OSCE civilian unarmed mission and its assets, we will continue to witness the threats and attacks directed at the brave men and women seconded by the participating States to monitor and thus contribute to putting an end to gross violations of fundamental OSCE principles and commitments by the aggressor country.

The SMM continues to report about systematic and severe restrictions in the occupied areas of Donbas, in particular “in non-government-controlled areas of southern Donetsk region, where the armed formations consistently deny the SMM access to settlements along road M14, near the Azov Sea”. The Russian armed formations use various pretexts to prevent the SMM patrols from establishing facts, in accordance with the mandate, concerning Russia’s illegal military activities in that area.

Full, safe and unhindered access of the SMM remains key to exposing the fakes and disinformation of the huge Russian propaganda machinery. Debunking the Russian claims of the so-called “creeping offensive” of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, the SMM registers new sets of trenches seen for the first time, up to 1km further west than previously observed positions of the Russian armed formations near the occupied village of Stavky and city of Horlivka. The Russian armed formations, instead of pulling out from the Ukrainian territory, again attempt to seize larger areas in violation of the Minsk agreements and the contact line established by the Minsk

Memorandum. The Russian armed formations deny access of the SMM to weaponry depots or prohibit “taking cameras and telephones” as was the case in a compound in Luhansk city, with a clear aim to deny the monitors a possibility to register and report on the Russian military equipment in the occupied Donbas.

Distinguished colleagues,

In the fifth year of the conflict, the regular replenishment of the Russian weapons, manpower and ammunition remains a pillar of the Russian occupation. In its daily report of 2 November, the SMM informed on a “train consisting of two locomotives and 40 cargo wagons heading west” at the Chervona Mohyla railway station in Voznesenivka. This railway station, which serves as a transit point for Russia’s illegal supplies, is located just a few kilometers to the west of the Gukovo crossing point on the Russian-Ukrainian border, where the OSCE Border Observation Mission is deployed and reports about dozens of trains crossing weekly to Ukraine and the Russian Federation on a nearby track. Those are facts established by the OSCE field missions located in Ukraine and Russia. We do not know the contents of all of those numerous trains with dozens of cargo wagons observed by the SMM and the BOM. However, the Ukrainian authorities have the documented evidence of the use of those trains for transporting military equipment, ammunition and fuel and lubricants. We have findings of the SMM about illegal transfers across the international border, including military and at night. Introducing transparency at this segment of the border will have a critical role to progress in resolution of the conflict started by Russia. We look forward to a practical OSCE move in this direction in the run-up to the Ministerial Council in Milan.

Mr. Chairperson,

As the Organisation which has placed the respect for human rights at the core of its mandate and activities, we must not let the Russian Federation to deflect our attention from dire consequences of Russia’s illegal occupation of Crimea. The Russian security services and law enforcement bodies continue the campaign of persecution and intimidation. In the last PC meeting, we informed on the incident when the representatives of the Russian occupation forces stormed into a meeting of members of the “Crimean solidarity” association and accused several participants of violating anti-terrorist and anti-extremist legislation. This Tuesday, the same accusations were directed at the well-known Crimean Tatar lawyer Emil Kurbedinov who works tirelessly to provide legal aid to dozens of victims of the Russian occupation regime. We urge Russia to stop its repressive policies and observe its obligations, as the occupying power, under international humanitarian and human rights law.

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.