



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 1311st meeting of the Permanent Council
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Madam Chairperson,

Past weeks were marked by heavily increased Russia's military presence at the state border with Ukraine and in the temporarily occupied parts of Ukraine. This raised serious concerns about Kremlin's intentions, especially against the backdrop of a massive disinformation campaign led by Russia in parallel.

Last Friday, we took note of the statement by Russian Minister for Defense on the beginning of withdrawal of Russian troops from the border with Ukraine. We will closely follow if this announcement would be implemented in practice, easing tensions and reducing the risk of escalation. As of now, this withdrawal has been inconsistent: heavy weapons and majority of military personnel remain on the ground, while large landing ships stay in the Black Sea.

Moreover, as noted by Foreign Minister of Ukraine, I quote, "Russia still owes an explanation to Ukraine, OSCE and international community of why it really needed to bring such numerous forces equipped with some offensive weapons at the border with Ukraine in such excessive number of troops", end of quote. For this purpose, we will raise today an additional current issue on the recommendations provided at the 81st joint special PC-FSC meeting. Along with other participating States, we expect Russia to implement its commitments in the field of military transparency and confidence building measures. The coordinated stance by international community remains necessary to deter the Russian Federation from further provocative actions, undermining security of the entire OSCE area.

We should remember that Russia's massive military build-up at the Ukrainian-Russian border is only a part of its campaign against Ukraine as an independent sovereign state. Ukraine's territories in Donetsk and Luhansk regions, in the Crimean peninsula and adjacent waters, remain temporarily occupied by Russia. Last week, as we informed earlier, the Russian Federation has illegally closed a part of the Black Sea in the direction of the Kerch Strait, in direct violation of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. The Russian armed formations continue violating ceasefire regime in Donbas, drawing upon Russia's military support, command and financing. The number of Russian passports, illegally issued to Ukrainian citizens in the occupied parts of Donbas, is only increasing: a member of the Russian parliament has recently announced that until the end of this year, there will be 1 mln. of holders of such passports.

Kremlin's strategic goal is to force Ukraine and international community forget about Crimea and to move all negotiations on Donbas into the so-called "direct dialogue" with the leaders of the Russian occupation administration in Donetsk and Luhansk. This will not happen. President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy stressed recently, that he has no intention to speak to terrorists.

Faced with Ukraine's principled position, the Russian side continues its military provocations along the line of contact. Previous SMM weekly report of 20 April informed on 73 per cent increase of ceasefire violations. The most recent one of 27 April says about 19 per cent decrease, but mentions at the same time a three-fold increase in the number of explosions. These fluctuations testify to fragility of the security situation on the ground, which can sharply escalate whenever the Russian leadership considers it necessary.

The Russian Federation continues supplying its illegal armed formations in Donbas, in particular with modern Russian armaments, produced only in Russia. On 14 April, the SMM spotted for the first time 15 armoured utility vehicles "UAZ Esaul" near the occupied village of Oleksandrivske, 21km from the contact line.

Instead of fueling violence in Donbas, the Russian side should focus its efforts on implementing its part of the security provisions of the Minsk agreements, which it signed and agreed to fulfil. What we witnessed last week, to the contrary, was new mines planted by the Russian armed formations inside Petrivske disengagement area, a Ukrainian demining team shelled by Russian proxies near Hnutove, and 123 Minsk-proscribed weapons spotted by the SMM in the occupied parts of Donbas. The Russian armed formations killed 1 and wounded 2 Ukrainian servicemen during last 7 days.

In the previous meeting of the Permanent Council, much attention has been paid to the camera at the Oktiabr site, which the SMM was forced to disable after the Russian armed formations had installed without SMM permission their own cameras on the mast of an SMM camera system. Immediately after that, the Russian mercenaries established at that site a new military position with two mortars violating withdrawal lines (this was informed by the SMM in its daily report of 26 April). In the morning of 27 April, the Russian occupiers used that position to attack Ukrainian servicemen by mortar fire, leaving one of them wounded. This is an utterly unacceptable situation, when the SMM assets are used by the Russian side to gain military advantage. We demand Russia to reverse its actions, to remove its new military position and to allow the SMM implement its mandate on security monitoring.

We regret that at the most recent TCG meeting on 27–28 April it was again impossible to finalize the recommitment to ceasefire despite positive expectations on the eve of Orthodox Easter. We hope this would be done in the following days, and the ceasefire would be maintained. A whole year has passed since the previous mutual release of detainees took place in April 2020. Any progress on humanitarian track of the Minsk agreements, including opening additional EECs and demining, continues to be blocked by the Russian side under false pretexts.

In Crimea, the Russian occupation administration maintains its policy of persecuting dissenting voices. Crimean Tatars remain the primary victims. They are not only illegally detained and sentenced under trumped-up charges, they are also forcibly moved to the territory of the Russian Federation, in flagrant violation of Russia's obligations under the international humanitarian law. The most recent data by the independent lawyers indicate to more than 50 such cases.

Last Monday, on 26 April, five years have passed since activities of Mejlis, the representative body of Crimean Tatars, were illegally banned by the Russian occupation administration. Despite provisional measures ordered by the UN International Court of Justice in April 2017, Russia has not revoked its decision. We strongly condemn Russia's policy and call on the OSCE community to remain seized of the 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, mercenaries and their hardware from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and fully implementing its commitments under the Minsk agreements.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.