



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 1283rd meeting of the Permanent Council
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Mr. Chairperson,

I think there are reasons for a profound dismay regarding the situation in the Trilateral Contact Group. Time is now to sound the alarm.

We fully share the concerns raised by the Albanian Chairmanship and many participating States in the last PC meeting about the state of affairs in the process of peaceful settlement of the conflict. The TCG's productive work has been virtually suspended for several weeks now, despite a number of practical decisions and arrangements – with some of them agreed at the expert level – waiting to be put into effect. This is utterly unacceptable.

Russia's demands to amend the Resolution adopted by the Ukrainian Parliament on organizing local elections on 25 October is just a pretext – simply an excuse for Russia's refusal to implement the Minsk agreements and the agreements reached in the *Normandie Four* format, in the first place the Common agreed conclusions of 9 December 2019. Yesterday, for instance, there was another excuse: the work of the TCG was effectively ground to a halt for three and a half hours by the demands of the Russian delegation to make an audio or video recording of the meeting, notwithstanding the normal diplomatic practice, previous traditions in the TCG and the absence of any agreement on that point from other members of the TCG. No surprise, the Trilateral Contact Group was unable – yet again – to finalize important work already completed at the level of working groups long time ago, like mine action and in other areas.

On the security track, Russia's representatives adopted the same approach, claiming the additional ceasefire measures adopted after lengthy discussions and scrupulous drafting work on 22 July 2020 should be scrapped and renegotiated again. And this is notwithstanding numerous reports by the OSCE SMM that the current ceasefire regime actually works (despite occasional shortcomings and violations, despite the fact that there have not been any civilian casualties or damage to civilian infrastructure, despite other positive changes on the ground). Russia instead demands that so called “joint inspections” be organized to check the reports and conclusions of

the OSCE. Let me state very clearly: Ukraine fully trusts the OSCE and highly appreciates the SMM's valuable reporting.

Returning to the question of the procedural Resolution adopted by the Parliament on holding local elections, in fact there is still long path ahead before we could start preparations for holding such elections in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Much work should also be done in the TCG Political working group, but it has been blocked as well, despite best efforts of Ambassador Morel and repeated calls by the Ukrainian delegation to resume paragraph-by-paragraph discussions on the documents on its agenda.

Blocking any progress on other tracks of the Minsk agreements, such as disengagement of troops and hardware, opening of new EECPs and mutual release of detainees, is equally counterproductive. On these tracks too, Russia also uses other excuses to finalize arrangements, or hinder or otherwise delay implementation of already reached agreements. We urge the Russian side to drop its practice of blackmailing and return to constructive consultations within the TCG. Civilians must not die due to the lack of demining and suffer at the existing EECPs along the contact line, when we are ready to open additional ones.

The current ceasefire in Donbas, unprecedented in its duration and comprehensiveness since the very beginning of Russian-Ukrainian armed conflict, should serve as a solid basis for further progress. The number of ceasefire violations should drop to zero and be complemented by withdrawal of heavy weapons, Russian armed formations, military equipment and mercenaries from the occupied parts of Ukraine, as well as reinstatement of full control of the state border by the government of Ukraine. This requires political will by the Russian side, similar to what it has demonstrated by instructing its armed personnel to adhere to ceasefire along the contact line in Donbas since 27 July.

As of now, we do not witness such readiness of the Russian side. Despite relatively calm security situation in Donbas, the Russian armed formations continue to restrict access of the SMM ground patrols to the occupied territories, in 53 occasions during four weeks of September. This begs the question: what do they hide from the SMM?

In the same period, 154 heavy weapons were registered in violation of their withdrawal lines by the SMM in Russia-occupied parts of Donbas (compared to only nine in government-controlled areas). Anti-personnel mines belonging to the Russian armed formations were spotted by the Mission on 19 and 21 September near Molodizhne and Styla, respectively. The SMM continues to report on new trenches and military positions, assessed as belonging to the Russian armed formations, including near Zolote disengagement area, despite the TCG agreed ban on offensive operations. Let me stress: new trenches and military positions, not even extension of the existing ones. On 23 September, Ukrainian side had to jam two Russian UAVs, which crossed the contact line despite the ban on operation of any types of aerial vehicles of the sides, also agreed in the TCG as a part of additional measures to strengthen the ceasefire.

The most recent developments along the contact line indicate deterioration of the security situation. Yesterday, on 30 September, the Russian armed formations attacked Ukrainian military positions eleven times in eight different locations. One Ukrainian serviceman was wounded close to Zaitseve. We strongly urge the Russian side to stop

its increasing provocations and to return to the negotiating table. Ukraine remains committed to peaceful politico-diplomatic resolution of the conflict. As it was mentioned during the recent visit of President Zelenskyy to Donetsk region on 26 September, the Ukrainian side is ready to hold the TCG meetings on a weekly basis, to accelerate the consultations process.

We also stand ready to discuss with Russia the issue of peaceful de-occupation of the Crimean peninsula, which is a part of resolution of the conflict based on the OSCE core principles and norms of international law. Restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty within its internationally recognized borders requires withdrawal of the Russian occupation forces from the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. Until that happens, we demand Russia to provide access of the international monitoring mechanisms to the temporarily occupied Crimea.

The urgency of such access has again been confirmed by the facts recorded in the most recent report by the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine covering the period from February to July 2020. Its Crimea-related part, which we invite all delegations of participating States to examine, documents ongoing pressure against Crimean residents including illegal application by Russia of its own legislation as occupying Power and illegal military conscription of protected persons prohibited under international humanitarian law. Persecution of Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians continues: on 16 September, seven more Ukrainian citizens were unlawfully sentenced by the Russian occupation authorities for up to 19 years of imprisonment in yet another fabricated "Hizb ut-Tahrir" case, which clearly demonstrates Russia's unchanged systemic policy of religious discrimination and political reprisals. We call on the participating States to react on this unlawful sentencing.

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, Mr. Chairperson.