



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 1345th meeting of the Permanent Council
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Madam Chairperson,

Last week, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitri Peskov claimed that "Russia poses no threat to anyone". It is how Moscow is trying to placate the international community about the movement of its armed forces in close vicinity to the border with Ukraine.

However, after Russia has occupied about seven per cent of Ukraine's territory and its aggression has already claimed lives of many thousands of Ukrainian citizens, more is needed to prove that Russia is not a threat. Words and promises must match with good political will to implement the obligations under the Minsk agreements and with real actions to deescalate the situation on the ground.

But has the Russian Federation reversed the temporarily occupation of Crimea?

Maybe, a decision was finally taken to cease the armed aggression in certain areas of Luhansk and Donetsk regions of Ukraine?

Has Moscow recognized its responsibility for the conflict and provided guarantees of non-repetition of aggressive acts?

Or has the Russian Federation abandoned its plans of a new military offensive against Ukraine?

Definitely, not. The reality speaks about the opposite. Russian armed forces permanently maintain a powerful offensive grouping around Ukraine.

After the completion of the military exercises this summer, Russia's armed forces remain in the European part of Russia, not far from Ukraine's border. Some of them are a few thousand kilometres from their home basis.

Since 2014, Russia has been systematically preparing military infrastructure in the border areas with Ukraine, while temporarily occupied Donbas and Crimea together with heavily militarized areas of the Black Sea and Azov Sea have been turned into Russia's military outposts on the sovereign territory of Ukraine.

With that in mind, it would take just days for Russia to redeploy the personnel and to launch a new full-fledged attack. This is the reality.

Another worrying trend is that the security situation along the contact line continues to deteriorate simultaneously with heightened rhetoric of the Russian leadership. 95 per cent increase of ceasefire violations over the week is extremely worrying. The daily average of 739 violation is much higher than it was before July 2020 (620).

The Russian armed formations are increasing the intensity of shelling of settlements and civilian objects. In September, Ukraine recorded seven such shellings; in October it was nine. However, as of 16 November, already eight shellings have been recorded.

For instance, on the 16 November, Mar'inka settlement was under fire of (82mm) mortars. A residential building was destroyed.

On the 14 November, Nevelske settlement, Donetsk region, was shelled with 50 rounds of 122-mm artillery. It left two houses destroyed, but, luckily, two pensioners were rescued from the debris. However, the attack was repeated on 17 November - as a result, two more houses were left destroyed and five damaged.

These attacks also endanger critical infrastructure, as it happened with the site of the Popasna Regional water company, supplying water to approximately 4,500 beneficiaries.

Neither Russia respects the rules of war protecting the medical personnel. Last week, two medical cars were damaged and one Ukrainian medical military was critically wounded.

Many of these shellings are conducted with the Minsk-proscribed weaponry.

One emblematic case was reported by the SMM on the 11th November. An SMM long-range UAV spotted two self-propelled howitzers Gvozdika, 122mm, near the occupied settlement Fedorivka. They were stationed about 12 km from the contact line, while howitzer's firing range is almost 16 km.

Their barrels were facing westwards and elevated at about 45 degrees. And of course, they fired rounds. After the fire had been completed, the howitzers left for a compound near Novoselivka settlement, something about 5 km from Fedorivka.

At the same time, Russian UAVs continue crossing the contact line in violation of the Minsk agreements and additional measures to strengthen the ceasefire. Two days ago, the UAV Orlan 10 was intercepted. It is developed and produced by the "Specialized technological centre" in Saint Petersburg, the Russian Federation. This UAV is operated only by the Russian armed forces and is used for reconnaissance and adjustment of the artillery fire.

Should I ask the Russian delegation about the origin of the weaponry in the occupied areas?

Facts speak for themselves. According to the Mission, between January 2019 and August 2021, 60 per cent of patrols in border areas faced freedom of movement restrictions. SMM was either denied access to the suspended BCPs, or told to leave the area immediately; moreover, several exclusion zones have been effectively created. While the long-range UAV asset has proven to be the most efficient tool for monitoring border areas, however, in 2021, approximately 80 per cent of all flights have been affected by signal interference, compared to 60 per cent in the same period of 2020.

Distinguished colleagues,

Apart from military actions, Russia proceeds further with its hybrid toolbox.

On the 15 November, the president of the Russian Federation signed a decree which recognizes the so-called 'product origin certificate' issued in the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

This is how Russia acts. First, Moscow expropriated Ukrainian enterprises in the occupied territories. Now, it expropriates economically Ukrainian territories. However, every time it is covered up by the humanitarian agenda.

Recognition of "certificates", unilateral designation of checkpoints to move goods across the temporarily uncontrolled section of the state border of Ukraine and other measures provided by the decree clearly demonstrate Russia's purposeful policy to consolidate its effective control over the temporarily occupied territories.

Furthermore, the signing of the decree contradicts Russia's commitments under the Minsk agreements and agreements reached within the Normandy format, undermines the efforts of Germany, France and Ukraine to restore the productive work of these important platforms for peaceful settlement.

We urge the Russian side to revoke this decision as well as other decisions introducing Russia's legislation in the temporarily occupied territories, including on passportization, the use of Russian currency, and other acts aimed at incorporating the occupied areas into the Russian political and economic space.

We also call upon the Russian Federation as a party to the conflict to assume in good faith its responsibility for peaceful settlement. Such a step would significantly change the overall environment in the conflict resolution process and contribute to making the work of the TCG more result-oriented and constructive.

Especially, lifting of restrictions on the freedom of movement through the contact line is long overdue. So is the opening of the two additional EECs in Zolote and Schastia, and finalization of demining plans.

This serious impediment to the free movement of Ukrainians and their ability to enjoy basic rights, including a right to healthcare, as well as to the restoration of people-to-people contacts must be finally removed.

I would also like to praise the important work, done by the SMM's able team, in order to improve monitoring in the occupied territories and near the state border with the Russian Federation.

Therefore, I call on all participating States to support the Mission's clear and open request for political and technical support in this regard, as outlined in relevant SMM's Concept note, distributed by the Swedish Chairpersonship recently.

Implementation of para 4 of the Minsk protocol, opening additional forward patrol bases together with enhancing technical capabilities of the SMM would significantly contribute to improving the security and humanitarian situation in the region.

Excellencies,

The latest developments in the occupied Crimea are also worrying.

Crimean Tatar lawyer Edem Semydyaev, who is a defender in many politically motivated legal cases, is under arrest for 12 days. The arrest of the lawyer, after his previous detention on 25 October during his professional legal activity, violates his professional rights and represents continuation of systematic repressions in the peninsula. It also illustrates the problems human rights defenders are facing in Crimea. Therefore, we call the OSCE institutions to follow closely this situation.

We are also concerned about the conditions the illegal detainees are facing. Last week, Asan and Aziz Akhtemovy, Crimean Tatars, who were detained in September together with Nariman Dzhelyal, complained about inhumane conditions of detention, sleep deprivation, lack of nutrition, failure to receive qualified medical care and denial of family visits. This is nothing else but pressure to admit their guilt.

While the pandemic sets records, the occupation administration selectively applies sanitary rules to suppress the freedom of assembly. This happened with four waves of mass detention of Crimean Tatars, as reported recently. At the same time, militaristic events are taking place in Crimea without any restrictions. Children are especially affected. A specific budget program was allocated to this end, namely, to promote military service in the Russian armed forces and to increase the number of members of so called "Yunarmiya" – "a young army". In 2021-2024, the Russian occupation authorities are planning to spend 22 mln US dollars on these activities. This is a gross violation of international humanitarian law that forbids to compel the inhabitants of the occupied territory to swear allegiance to the enemy power.

Military indoctrination, political propaganda and blatant disrespect for the protection measures against pandemic create additional threats for Crimean residents, in particular for children.

This and other crimes are well reflected in sixth consequent draft resolution on human rights situation in Crimea adopted yesterday by the UN General Assembly Third Committee. We are grateful to partners for the principled position and call to reiterate this support while voting in favor of both drafts - on human rights and militarization in UN General Assembly in December.

To conclude, we again urge the Russian Federation to stop its aggression against Ukraine, reverse its illegal occupation of Crimea, de-occupy certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, and restore freedom of navigation in the Black Sea, through the Kerch Strait and in the Sea of Azov. Russia must fully implement its commitments

under the Minsk agreements, including the withdrawal of its armed forces, mercenaries, armed formations, and weapons from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.