



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International Organizations in Vienna

**Statement on “Russia’s on-going aggression against Ukraine
and illegal occupation of Crimea”**

As for delivery by the Delegation of Ukraine
to the 1138th meeting of the Permanent Council,
23 March 2017

Mr. Chairman,

The developments in the Donbas region of Ukraine prove that the Russian military aggression against the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine continues unabated. In the past week, between 15–21 March, the Ukrainian positions were attacked 551 times, including 155 cases of shellings by the hybrid Russian forces from Minsk-proscribed heavy weapons. As a result, 9 Ukrainian militaries were killed and 35 were wounded. Overall, since the beginning of Russia’s invasion into Ukraine, 2629 Ukrainian servicemen lost their lives defending their native soil, while 9453 were wounded and injured.

The most recent serious security aggravation took place on 20 March, when the illegal armed formations totaling up to 40 fighters carried out an attack near Vodyane with the support of MLRS BM-21 Grad and heavy artillery. The hybrid Russian forces fired 65 Grad missiles, 80 artillery shells of 152mm and 122mm, 55 mortar rounds of 120mm caliber.

The hybrid Russian forces continue to use a variety of heavy weapons that were brought into Donbas in large numbers by Russia to advance its intervention. As the SMM registered in its report of 20 March, more than 200 weapons – tanks, self-propelled howitzers and anti-tank guns (all of undetermined types) were located just in one place, near Uspenka 23km south-west of Luhansk. Before that, in the beginning of January this year, the SMM registered in its report of 6 January the presence 347 pieces of Russian heavy weaponry (MLRS, tanks and howitzers) near Miusynsk, Buhaivka and Manuilivka.

As reflected in the SMM report of 17 March, the use by the hybrid Russian forces of a man-portable launcher with incendiary warheads “Shmel” was registered by the SMM camera in Stanytsia Luhanska. On 18 March the Russian “Shmel” launcher was also discovered by the Ukrainian military in Zaitseve in a hideout, set up by a sabotage or reconnaissance group. Such launchers belong to the armament of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation and have never been on the inventory of the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

The hybrid warfare led by Russia against Ukraine in Donbas is reinforced by the permanent threat of use of force by the Russian Federation alongside the border with Ukraine and from the illegally occupied Crimean peninsula, militarized by the Russian occupation authorities. On 20 March, more than 2500 Russian paratroopers and nearly 600 military vehicles were deployed to the peninsula to take part in military exercises. We condemn the conduct of these exercises by Russia on the illegally occupied sovereign territory of Ukraine.

Distinguished colleagues,

In the past weeks we kept focus of the Permanent Council on the sharp degradation of security around the town of Avdiivka, triggered by the military offensive and attacks of the hybrid Russian forces on the positions of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, residential areas and critical civilian infrastructure. Dozens of thousands of people were repeatedly cut off from the supply of electricity, water and heating, in some cases under severe circumstances of very low outdoors temperature.

The Russian side has persisted in a full disregard of dire humanitarian consequences of its aggressive actions in Donbas and continues to pursue this strategy. As an example, as soon as the electricity supply was restored to the Donetsk water filtration station on 17 March, the illegal armed formations opened fire in the direction of the SMM monitors, JCCC officers and representatives of the State Emergency Service of Ukraine who were monitoring adherence to the ceasefire for demining at and around the filtration station as well as the restoration of water supply, as stated in the relevant SMM spot report.

Taking into account the consistency of Russia's military action of targeting the critical civilian infrastructure in Donbas to undermine the efforts of the Ukrainian authorities in Donbas and to further destabilize the situation in the country, the Ukrainian government took a decision to build a new power line to Avdiivka, which will provide a stable source of power for the local population suffering from the Russian weapons. The construction works are planned to be completed before 20 May 2017.

The total disregard for humanitarian aspects is also demonstrated by Russia and its proxies on the issue of release and exchange of hostages and illegally detained persons based on the "all for all" principle, as envisaged by the Minsk agreements. Meaningful progress on this issue of priority humanitarian concern was blocked by Moscow. Restrictions are yet to be removed on the involvement in this process of the ICRC and the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission. SMM monitors are denied access to the hostages and illegally detained persons. Meanwhile, the most update information indicates that the number of hostages captured in the certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions has increased to 118 people, including civilians and military. As 21 March marked the World Down Syndrome Day, we draw attention of the delegations to the fate of the religious scholar Ihor Kozlovskyy who stayed in Donetsk to look after his son suffering from this syndrome. In January 2016 he was captured by the illegal armed formations and his whereabouts remain unknown since then. We urge Russia to immediately release hostages and illegally detained persons,

including the Ukrainian citizens illegally detained in Russia and in the occupied Crimea.

Mr. Chairman,

In the last Permanent Council meeting we provided a detailed information on the recent decision of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine to temporarily suspend the cargo traffic across the contact line with the areas of Donbas controlled by the hybrid Russian forces. Let me underscore again that it was a forced decision in response to a chain of Russia's recent steps that contradicted the Minsk agreements and violated Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity: a recognition of the so called "documents" issued by illegal structures in Donbas; a switch to circulation of Russian rubles; the seizure of the enterprises that worked under Ukrainian legislation; declaration by Russia's proxies of the so called "border" along the contact line.

Unfortunately, the real intentions of Moscow cannot be easily detected from its political declarations, but they are reflected in the ongoing diverse and large-scale support of the illegal armed formations in Donbas. Notably, on 17 March the Russian occupation authorities in the Crimea received the leaders of these formations from Donetsk and Luhansk, who presented a new structure which would deal with "further integration of Donbas into the Russian Federation".

As we have witnessed in the last three years, the Russian authorities persistently attempt to evade responsibility for their actions of starting the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and in doing so invented their false claim of "internal Ukrainian conflict". Today we would like to draw attention of the Permanent Council to a few photographs, which we shared with the delegations, that explicitly capture the collusion between Russia's high authorities and the illegal armed formations in Donbas, which existed from the very moment of the latter's inception. The present hybrid Russian forces in Donbas consist of a large component of Russian citizens, backed up by Russian regular troops. Moscow changed some faces of the criminals in Donbas, but did not change the nature of its operation. It is critically important to beware of Russia's deceptive strategies of hybrid warfare as Moscow polishes and fine-tunes its methods to make them applicable to any chosen target or victim.

Distinguished colleagues,

In the Crimean peninsula, the Russian occupation authorities continue to intimidate, persecute and silence the dissenting voices. They launched so-called "trials" of the Ukrainian activist Volodymyr Balukh and of the Ukrainian journalist Mykola Semena. On 21 March, they handed an indictment to the Deputy Chairman of the Crimean Tatar Mejlis Ilmi Umerov alleging "calls for violation of the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation". On the same day four representatives of the NGO "Ukrainian Cultural Centre" were summoned for questioning to the Crimean branch of Russia's Federal Security Service.

We urge Russia to stop political persecutions and respect the human rights of the people under Russian occupation.

Mr. Chairman,

As the Russian Federation continues its aggression against Ukraine in flagrant violation of the UN Charter and the Helsinki Final Act principles, Ukraine will defend itself and protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. We remain committed to the Minsk agreements as the framework for peaceful resolution of the conflict in Donbas, started by Russia.

Moscow must be aware that any enterprise recently seized by the Russia-backed illegal armed formations in Donbas, which will try to sell the stolen property of Ukraine, will face sanctions. Any Russian company trading or investing into such enterprises will become an immediate object of international attention and sanctions. The goods produced at these stolen enterprises in Donbas will not be received in any civilized country of the world. We urge Russia to take steps that will ensure return of these enterprises to Ukraine's jurisdiction, to observe the cease-fire in Donbas and withdraw its heavy weapons.

The visits to Ukraine's territory of the Crimean peninsula, which is currently illegally occupied by Russia, can only take place with the consent of the Ukrainian authorities. We call upon Russia to refrain from its provocations, in particular involving the citizens of other OSCE participating States. The Ukrainian authorities will continue to closely monitor illegal entries and take applicable measures of response in compliance with the national legislation.

We urge Russia to return to the tenets of international law and reverse the illegal occupation of the Crimean peninsula which is an integral part of Ukraine.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.