



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 1289th meeting of the Permanent Council
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Mr. Chairperson,

On 10 November, the Government of Ukraine opened two additional entry-exit checkpoints in Zolote and Shchastia at the line of contact. The same day, it has also resumed the work of Stanytsia Luhanska EECP, which was temporarily suspended as part of the efforts to counter the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, local residents have now received a choice of three EECPs in the Luhansk region, which would greatly ease their hardships while crossing the line of contact.

Moreover, the newly established Shchastia EECP includes a bank branch, a post office, a pharmacy, a mother and child room, and a Center for Administrative Services, which provides 88 administrative services for the citizens of Ukraine. For instance, pensioners would no longer need to proceed further to the government-controlled areas while travelling across the line of contact to collect their pensions. They will be able to do that on the spot, in Shchastia, and to immediately return to their homes in the parts of Donbas, temporarily occupied by Russia.

The readiness of this infrastructure was inspected in particular by President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy during his working trip to the Luhansk region on 6 November, together with representatives of diplomatic missions and Special Representative Heidi Grau.

I would remind that opening of new entry-exit checkpoints along the line of contact, based primarily on humanitarian criteria, was one of the arrangements reached by the "Normandie Format" leaders in Paris in December 2019.

Regretfully, this became yet another example of Russia's failure to implement the commitments it has undertaken. Neither Shchastia, nor Zolote EECPs were opened by the Russian occupation administration in Luhansk. Those civilians who tried to cross the line of contact, were turned back by members of the Russian armed formations.

In the Donetsk region, the EECPs continue to be opened from the Russia-controlled part only in a limited format, on specific days, as confirmed by the SMM reports. Meanwhile, the border crossing points at the Ukrainian-Russian state border, controlled by Russia and its occupation administrations, remain opened: the OSCE Border Observer Mission continues to report on persons crossing the Donetsk and Gukovo BCPs.

We urge the Russian delegation to provide detailed explanations on its position regarding Shchastia and Zolote EECPs. The discussions on this matter,

which took place within the TCG and its Working Groups on 10 and 11 November, cannot be characterized as constructive. Moreover, they prevented substantial consultations on such important issues as mutual release of detainees and search for missing persons.

Russia's political will remains necessary for reaching progress on the ground. When Kremlin demonstrates it, it brings tangible results. As reported by the SMM in its most recent thematic report on civilian casualties in the conflict-affected regions of eastern Ukraine, the number of such casualties decreased from almost five hundred in 2017 to only 74 in 2020. The most dramatic reduction of numbers took place after the additional measures to consolidate ceasefire took effect on 27 July, and the Russian armed formations, as instructed by Russia, have largely - but not entirely - stopped their military activities along the line of contact.

There is indeed a long list of steps, which must yet be made by the Russian side.

Its illegal armed formations have to stop completely shellings of Ukrainian military positions. Last week, from 2 to 8 November, they violated ceasefire for 29 times from grenade launchers, heavy machine guns and small arms, but also from 82mm mortars on 5 November. As a result, two Ukrainian servicemen were wounded. Yesterday, on 11 November, another Ukrainian serviceman was wounded following the shellings delivered by the Russian armed formations in three different locations, including with 82mm mortars near Vodiane.

Russia must stop supplying its weapons, ammunition and mercenaries, and to withdraw them from Ukraine. On 8 November, the SMM spotted an electronic warfare system (RB-341V Leer-3) at an airfield near Luhansk city. This is the most modern Russian system, produced since 2015. We urge the Russian delegation to explain, how this system was brought into the territory of Ukraine, and who operates it.

Russia must stop expanding its sovereignty in the occupied parts of Ukraine. On 6 November, the Russian Federation promulgated the Presidential Decree, which once again attempts to legitimize the unlawful issuance of documents and vehicle registration plates to Donetsk and Luhansk regions residents, as well as granting them Russian citizenship in a simplified procedure. As stated by the MFA of Ukraine, this represents yet another element of aggression against Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, with clear evidence of the Kremlin's intention to continue the war against Ukraine not only by military but also by legal means. We thank the OSCE participating States, which condemn these actions by Russia, and encourage them to put the policy on non-recognition of such so-called "documents" in practice, as the EU member States and some other participating States did.

The Russian side must stop impeding the work of the SMM. The most recent thematic report on restrictions to the SMM's freedom of movement and other impediments to the fulfilment of its mandate covering the first half of 2020 refers to 96 per cent of the total number of freedom of movement restrictions taking place in Russia-occupied parts of Donbas.

Russia must return its officers to the JCCC. We share the SMM's view that their departure continues to have an impact on the SMM activities, such as the provision of security guarantees for repairs and maintenance of infrastructure and demining, as well as when the SMM's freedom of movement is restricted.

Only when the proper security environment is ensured in the temporarily occupied parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, it would be possible to hold local elections in those areas. This was in particular stressed by President of Ukraine during his recent working trip to Donbas.

The Ukrainian side has submitted to the TCG its proposals on a Plan of joint steps, which should be implemented, step by step, to organize such elections. We hope for constructive discussions in the TCG, and we look forward to the videoconference by the Normandie Four advisers, which is planned for tomorrow, 13 November.

Mr. Chairperson,

This week, at the Third Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting organized by the Albanian Chairmanship together with the ODIHR, the delegation of Ukraine raised the issue of the ongoing illegal persecution of the religious communities and oppression of the freedom of religion by the Russian occupation administrations in Crimea and parts of Donbas.

One of the most outrageous examples of such policy by the occupying Power is the situation with a Ukrainian Orthodox Church temple in Yevpatoria, in the occupied Crimea. As emphasized by the MFA of Ukraine in its statement of 6 November, the recent so-called “court ruling” by the occupation administration, ordering the demolition of this temple and the payment of a “fine”, is another proof of lawlessness with the aim to restrict religious freedom on the peninsula.

We wish to draw the attention of the OSCE participating States to this deliberate Russia’s policy aimed at eradication of everything Ukrainian in Crimea and suppression of religious freedoms of dissenting voices. We encourage the SMM to gather information and report facts on this situation in line with its overall mandate to monitor and support respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

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.