



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International
Organizations in Vienna

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Statement on Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine and illegal occupation of Crimea

As delivered by Ambassador Ihor Prokopchuk,
Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,
to the 1217th meeting of the Permanent Council,
14 February 2019

Mr. Chairperson,

Last Sunday the residents of the Donetsk region's town of Kramatorsk, which was visited by a large group of Ambassadors to the OSCE in May 2017, held a ceremony and opened a symbolic monument to remember the victims of a deadly attack by the Russian armed formations four years ago. On 10 February 2015 the attack in broad daylight by missiles of MLRS "Smerch" killed 17 and wounded 64 people, including 5 children. Russia and its armed formations had continued to act in full defiance of undertaken Minsk commitments on cease-fire and peaceful resolution of the conflict. Few days later in Minsk the Package of Measures was signed with the Russian Federation, as a party to the conflict, envisaging, in particular, comprehensive and sustainable ceasefire, withdrawal of all Russian armed formations, military equipment, as well as mercenaries from the territory of Ukraine under the OSCE monitoring, disarmament of illegal armed formations. The commitments, undertaken by Russia in 2015, have been violated by this country every single day since its representative put signature on the document, and since the Russian President reaffirmed respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine in a joint statement. The Russian aggression continues today inflicting loss of life, destruction and hardships on the Ukrainian people.

The very first step of the Minsk agreements, that is a comprehensive and sustainable ceasefire, remains unimplemented. Respective proposals of Ukraine in the TCG remain blocked by the Russian side. The SMM reports daily on fluctuating number of ceasefire violations and use of Minsk-proscribed weapons, which continue to cause casualties among servicemen and civilians. In the last week (4–10 February), 2 Ukrainian servicemen were killed and 7 were wounded. The Russian armed formations continue to breach the contact line agreed by the Minsk Memorandum and to deny access of the SMM to the border areas where Russia maintains resupply routes for its armed formations in Donbas. In the last week of January, another 19 cisterns with fuel and lubricants were delivered by Russia to its proxies only through the Rovenky railway station. At a border crossing point near Uspenka, the SMM

registered 63 trucks cargo and tank trucks including with “toxic” and “flammable” markings queuing to exit Ukraine. The volume of illegal traffic across the border demonstrates the lack of readiness on the part of Russia to stop its military intervention, implement the undertaken Minsk commitments and respect the international border as well as the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. After spotting last week a modern Russian radio-electronic jamming system R-330 “Zhitel”, this week the SMM spotted a modern Russian radio intelligence system TORN in the occupied parts of Donbas. This system is one of the latest Russian developments used exclusively by the Russian Armed Forces.

Distinguished colleagues,

Unpredictability of military intentions of the Russian side, which shows no indication of withdrawal from Ukraine, severely undermines fulfilment of such security provisions of the Minsk agreements as withdrawal of heavy weapons, disengagement and comprehensive demining, which have been constantly addressed in our debates. Nevertheless, the Ukrainian authorities continue demining activities, some of them recorded by the SMM in Zolote-4, Stanytsia Luhanska and Hranitne in the last few days, to improve conditions for the civilian population. At the same time, an SMM report, covering the period of October – December 2018, indicates that “no demining activities were recorded in non-government-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions”. We note that the Russian Federation consistently disregards its responsibilities as the occupying power, leading to further deterioration of situation for the local population, including with regard to their human rights and fundamental freedoms. The SMM registered, in particular, in its weekly report of 5 February the reduced access to medical care in the occupied parts of Luhansk region. The access to education in the occupied Donbas remains underreported by the SMM, as the Russian proxies continue to restrict the SMM patrols from visiting the schools.

We welcome the SMM’s update on resumption of full-time monitoring at the SMM forward patrol base in government-controlled Popasna, from where staff had been temporarily relocated since February 2018 due to security concerns. This development makes me recall again that the SMM has repeatedly confirmed its intention to widen the footprint in both Donetsk and Luhansk regions through establishment of new FPBs and a patrol hub, including in the Russia-occupied border areas of Donbas. Until now, these intentions remain unfulfilled, as the Russian armed formations continue to refuse security assurances for proposed locations close to the border with the Russian Federation. They also continue to severely restrict the access of the SMM patrols to those border areas, often citing “instructions from superiors”, the need for “written permission to cross or for a list of destinations”, or “ongoing special forces operations in the area.” Obviously, the claims about so called “special forces” operations in a territory, occupied by Russia-led forces since 2014, are a mere pretext for not letting the international observers enter the area. Notably, the SMM’s weekly report of 5 February states that the SMM’s freedom of movement was restricted on 11 non-mine-related occasions, “all in non-government-controlled areas.” These systematic and deliberate restrictions constitute a gross violation of the Mission’s mandate by the Russian Federation. We urge Russia to lift them without delay.

Mr. Chairperson,

Together with the predominant majority of participating States represented in this hall, we condemn the ongoing militarization and aggressive actions by Russia in the occupied Crimea, the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, which affect the security environment in the entire region. Ukrainian coastal areas continue to bear socio-economic losses caused by illegal impediments to the freedom of navigation imposed by the Russian Federation in the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait. The SMM reports confirm that “delays and reduction in ships willing to navigate through the Kerch Strait have led to reduced business, including cancelled contracts and an inability to acquire new contracts due to ongoing uncertainties” and increased costs of insurance policies. Dozens of Ukrainian citizens continue to be illegally detained by the Russian occupation forces in Crimea, including those who require urgent medical assistance but are deprived of it. On 7 February, detention of disabled Crimean Tatar Edem Bekirov was extended until 12 April. Ukrainian activists and Crimean Tatars remain victims of illegal searches, intimidation and persecution. The aggressor state does not stop at anything to eradicate any Ukrainian manifestation and to silence any dissenting voices in the territory under the illegal occupation.

24 Ukrainian servicemen captured by Russia near the Kerch Strait on 25 November 2018 have not been released and are not duly treated by Russia as prisoners of war in accordance with the Geneva Conventions. We urge Russia to release them immediately and unconditionally. We encourage the Chairmanship to take up this subject, together with the immediate release of all Ukrainian citizens in illegal detention in Russia, at the highest level in Moscow during the planned visit of the Chairman-in-Office to Russia. Seeking release by Russia of the prisoners of war and of hostages remains a top humanitarian priority, where we hope the Chairmanship will make its tangible contribution.

Mr. Chairperson,

Among numerous OSCE principles and commitments, that have been grossly violated and continue to be grossly violated by Russia, there are also commitments on refraining from support of terrorist and subversive activities in the territories of other participating States. It has become known to the Ukrainian competent authorities that the Russian special services, including those based in the occupied parts of Donbas, have launched a campaign of recruitment of Ukrainian nationals for carrying out arson attacks on religious buildings used by the parishes of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine. Specific instructions on carrying out such attacks are accompanied with significant financial rewards. We urge Russia to immediately stop its measures aiming at destabilization of Ukraine, including in the religious sphere.

Regarding the religious sphere, we also bring it to the attention of the Permanent Council that in Simferopol, in the illegally occupied Crimea, the Russian occupants ordered a single Ukrainian Orthodox Church in this city to leave the premises. This order of the occupation administration aims at effectively terminating the presence of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the peninsula and the religious life of its six parishes. We encourage the OSCE executive structures, including the SMM, to pay due attention to this issue and react to the developments. We urge Russia to

put an end to such repressive acts and abide by OSCE commitments regarding the freedom of religion or belief.

We again urge the Russian Federation to reverse its illegal occupation of Crimea and to stop its aggression against Ukraine, including by withdrawing its armed formations from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and fully implementing its commitments under the Minsk agreements.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

Additional remarks in response to the statement of the Russian delegation:

Mr. Chairperson,

I thank you for giving me the floor to make few comments in response to the statement of the Russian Federation.

First, I wish to draw attention to the statement of the Special Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine and in the Trilateral Contact Group Ambassador M.Sajdik in connection with the four years since signing of the Minsk Package of measures. He states that “this document – as well as the Minsk Protocol and the Minsk Memorandum of September 2014 – is the basis for the current work of the Trilateral Contact Group in seeking a peaceful resolution of the conflict in eastern Ukraine”. It is absolutely clear that all three main documents, signed in Minsk with Russia as a party to the conflict, form the Minsk agreements and are to be implemented. The Declaration of the OSCE Permanent Council of 20 January 2015 called for full implementation of the Minsk Protocol and the Memorandum of September 2014 and there is no other agreed position in the OSCE to indicate that this call could have lost its significance. This call is as relevant today as it was at the time of the document’s adoption. What is missing is the political will of Russia to fully implement the undertaken commitments, without cherry-picking and Russian reinterpretations as demonstrated by today’s statement.

Second, among many falsehoods we heard today from the Russian Ambassador particularly appalling and cynical was the claim as if “the Minsk Package of measures stopped Kyiv from drowning the Donbas in blood”. This makes me recall the circumstances of signing of this document which happened on 12 February 2015, but upon insistence of the Russian side the ceasefire would only become effective from 00.00 of 15 February. The Russian forces required extra days for their military offensive to seize the town of Debaltseve. When they failed within those few days, they started to massively violate the ceasefire 25 minutes after it took effect. On 18 February 2015 a special meeting of the Permanent Council was convened upon Ukraine’s request because of flagrant violations by Russia of its commitments, reaffirmed less than a week before. To save lives and spare the town from further Russia-inflicted destruction, the Ukrainian Armed Forces withdrew from the areas in and around Debaltseve. When the SMM was finally able to reach Debaltseve on 21

February 2015, this is what the Mission reported: “In Debaltseve, the SMM noted that almost all buildings had sustained damage, assessed to have been caused by artillery. All the streets and open spaces inside the town were full of debris and remnants of war. All roads were damaged from shelling. Very few people – mostly elderly – were on the streets. Metal chimneys leading out of basements were emitting smoke. Local people told the SMM that there was no electricity or gas and food was unavailable in shops. They said there were no working hospitals, First Aid stations or medical supplies in the town.”

This is the shocking picture of the aftermath of the cruel assault of the Russian forces on the town of Debaltseve, as witnessed by the SMM monitors. As aptly remarked few days ago, the Minsk Package of measures bears a birthmark of gross violations by the Russian Federation. All Minsk commitments remain breached by the Russian Federation until now.

Third, in connection with the OSCE ODIHR observation of elections of the President of Ukraine, due on 31 March 2019, I would draw attention of all interested delegations to the statement of the Delegation of Ukraine on this matter delivered at the Permanent Council meeting of 7 February 2019.

I would also add that on 7 February the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted a Law of Ukraine “On Amendments to some Laws of Ukraine concerning the Observation of the Electoral Process in Ukraine” which was supported by all political forces in the Verkhovna Rada, except one. The Law does not allow participation in the international electoral observation as official observers during elections in Ukraine of citizens (subjects) of the aggressor state or occupying power, as determined by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, or of nominees of the aggressor state or the occupying power. We expect all OSCE participating States and OSCE executive structures to be respectful of the sovereign will of the people of Ukraine, expressed in the Parliament through adoption of the above Law.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.