



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International
Organizations in Vienna

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

As for delivery by Ambassador Ihor Prokopchuk,
Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,
to the 1226th meeting of the Permanent Council,
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Mr. Chairperson,

In every PC meeting over the past five years Ukraine together with other participating States address the priority security challenges of ongoing Russia's aggression against Ukraine and use of military force, gross human rights violations in the temporarily occupied territories, political persecution and illegal detention of Ukrainian citizens by the Russian authorities as hostages and prisoners of war. Persistent calls upon Russia to stop aggression and occupation and return to the tenets of international law have been consistently defied by Kremlin. Whereas Moscow would regularly make political declarations about the need to implement the Minsk agreements, in practice it fully flouts Russia's commitments and, moreover, takes constant and deliberate measures to worsen the situation and derail prospects of peaceful resolution of the ongoing international armed conflict started by Russia.

It is in this chain of events that a presidential decree was signed in Russia last week on expedited issuance of Russia's passports in the temporarily occupied parts of Donbas. This decree constitutes a blatant violation of the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and political unity of Ukraine, a gross interference into internal affairs of my country and a powerful blow to the Minsk agreements. We strongly condemn this act by Kremlin, which is legally null and void and it will not alter the affiliation to Ukrainian citizenship of the residents of the occupied parts of Donbas. It is obvious that the Russian Federation resorts to illegal issuance of the Russian passports in an attempt to justify and legitimize its military presence in the occupied parts of Donbas. The OSCE participating States are well aware how hard Russia has been trying to deny established facts to conceal its military invasion into Donbas, but now with the so called "passportization" it seeks to create legal ground for open use of Russia's Armed Forces against Ukraine. The Kremlin regime invents nothing new - the same templates have been applied in Russia-driven and supported conflicts on

the territories of Georgia and the Republic of Moldova. The Russian propaganda narrative again claims so called “humanitarian grounds”, while it is the Russian invasion and occupation that create unbearable conditions for the people under the occupation and deny their human rights and fundamental freedoms. Reports of the UN HR Monitoring Mission in Ukraine are very clear in this regard.

Notably, the decree was enacted right after the conduct of free and democratic elections in Ukraine, which demonstrates Russia’s key objective of destabilizing the domestic political situation in Ukraine in the post-electoral period. Russia has taken an intentional step towards destroying the Minsk agreements and bears responsibility for the consequences.

On 25 April the UN Security Council addressed, upon request of Ukraine, the serious risks relating to the latest Russia’s provocative and escalatory move. We highly value the strong solidarity with Ukraine and a clear stance of condemnation of Russia’s actions.

Reflecting even briefly upon the situation in Russia-occupied parts of Donbas, we witness that these areas are under Russia’s military control and are run by Russia-appointed proxies, they have Russian rubles in circulation as the currency, Russian tax system, Russian media space, the education at schools follows Russian school curriculum with textbooks printed in Russia. This year school graduates are not admitted to final exams unless they receive the “identity paper” issued by occupation administration. Now Russian passports will be issued there and Russia has experience of artificially creating conditions to force people apply for these passports. For five years Russia has been supplying into Donbas its military personnel, weaponry and ammunition to sustain the armed assault on Ukraine. This is how the creeping annexation by Russia and the hybrid aggression look like. It can be stopped only by firm collective pressure on Russia, including through fostered sanctions regime.

Yesterday another presidential decree was issued in Russia, expanding the categories of Ukrainian citizens eligible for expedited obtaining of Russian passports. We condemn these acts and stress that they have no legal consequences.

Mr. Chairperson,

These provocative and most alarming political steps by the Russian Federation, related to the expedited issuance of the Russian passports to Ukrainian citizens, were accompanied by the aggravation of security situation in the conflict zone in Donbas. For the first time the so-called “Easter ceasefire” was not agreed within the TCG due to the opposition of the Russian side to providing security guarantees on its part. Both attempts to reach consensus, on 18 and 24 April, failed as the Russian delegation refused to undertake its responsibility as a party to the conflict and urged Ukraine to sustain instead a so-called “direct dialogue” with the Russian proxies in Donbas. We support the call of OSCE CiO M.Lajčák on “the urgent need to not only recommit to a renewed truce, but agree on a sustainable and irreversible ceasefire” and fully share his view that “a safe and secure environment is a key precondition for any positive development, including improving the dire humanitarian situation”. In this vein, the Ukrainian side has taken a unilateral commitment to adhere to ceasefire. Whenever calls are made to “both sides of the conflict”, this fact is to be taken into due account.

The Russian side continued strengthening its military presence close to the contact line in Donbas: in its weekly reports of 16 and 23 April, the SMM observed 270 weapons in violation of their respective withdrawal lines, 218 of which were registered in the Russia-occupied territories. Several dozens of MLRS and howitzers, which were reported by the Mission in government-controlled areas, had been spotted at the train stations in Kostiantynivka and Bakhmut, which are railway hubs used by the Armed Forces of Ukraine for rotation. The SMM enjoys freedom of movement in the government-controlled areas of Donbas, including through the railway transit hubs, which is not the case for the Russia-occupied territories. The Russian proxies prevent any attempts of the Mission to monitor such hubs: on 15 and 16 April, they told the SMM patrols, which attempted to monitor the situation at the Chervona Mohyla railway station near Voznesenivka, to leave the area. I would remind that this railway station is located across the Russian checkpoint Gukovo, in which the Border Observation Mission regularly registers the sound of trains running on the railway tracks both to Ukraine and Russia. Transparency at the border remains a critical element of the Minsk agreements, in which the OSCE has its own significant role. We urge the Slovak Chairmanship to resume informal consultations among the participating States aimed at enhancing transparency at the border and increasing the efficiency of the OSCE field missions in reaching this goal.

We regret that the Russian side continues undermining efficiency of the SMM by restricting freedom of movement of its patrols, intimidating monitors and attacking the Mission's assets. On 18 April, a long-range UAV crashed in Donbas, the third one since the SMM resumed operations of such UAVs a year ago. While "it is premature to draw conclusions about the causes of the incident", as reported by the SMM, I would remind that the Mission has repeatedly registered the most modern Russian systems of electronic warfare in the Russia-occupied parts of Donbas deployed throughout the conflict zone, including an artillery target acquisition radar system (1L259) near occupied city of Horlivka five days before downing long-range UAV. Until now, the Russian side has evaded its responsibility, including financial, for downing the long-range UAVs in October 2018 and February 2019. No explanations were provided by Russia on how these sophisticated systems of electronic warfare got into the territory of Ukraine.

Last week marked two years since the tragic death of the OSCE SMM member Joseph Stone, which caused a profound shock to the entire OSCE community. We pay our tribute to him. It reminds us about the highest security risks, which the SMM patrols continue to face daily in the Russia-occupied parts of Donbas. We underscore once again the responsibility of Russia for the safety and security of the SMM in those areas.

The SMM is a valuable source of objective and relevant information on the developments in Donbas, which remain in the spotlight of the PC. We note the SMM's updates about the measures undertaken by the Government of Ukraine to improve the infrastructure and safety of the entry-exit checkpoints at the contact line in Donbas, where civilians continue to face hardships including the risk to be caught in fire of the Russian proxies. The Mission observed new overhead structures, metal booths and layer of tarmac in Hnutove, new overhead structures and widened access road in Maiorsk and demining activities around the EECP in Marinka. Following

these improvements, the SMM reported on traffic higher than usual passing through the EECF. The Government of Ukraine will continue its efforts to alleviate the humanitarian hardships for civilians caused by the ongoing Russian aggression.

We will also continue to rely on the SMM and its ground presence in the Russia-occupied parts of Donbas to provide information on the most pressing cases of violation of the human rights and fundamental freedoms by the Russian occupation forces, in full compliance with the Mission's mandate. We note the SMM's follow-up on reports about the search of the Holy Trinity Cathedral of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in the city of Luhansk by the Russian armed formations. Belongings of the church were confiscated and its representatives were locked for 4.5-hour long "interviews". We strongly condemn these repressive actions of the Russian side violating the freedom of religion or belief and encourage the SMM to continue implementing this part of its monitoring mandate. In particular, we expect the Mission to check the latest reports of 25 April on the decision of the Russian armed formations to confiscate the church of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in the village of Kuznetsovo-Mykhailivka in the occupied part of Donetsk region and to transfer its ownership to the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine. Another incident, on which we expect the SMM's follow up, is the explosion in "SkhidCarbon" coal mine near Yuryivka village in the occupied part of Luhansk region, which reportedly took lives of 17 people. We also request the Russian delegation to provide information on the visit of the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations to the accident site, as its three vehicles with blue emergency lights were spotted by the Border Observation Mission at the Donetsk Border Crossing Point on early morning of 26 April.

Mr. Chairperson,

In Russia-occupied Crimea, the occupation authorities strengthen political persecutions of Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars aimed at intimidating and stifling the dissenting voices, independent journalists and civic activists. In the last two weeks, they sentenced citizens of Ukraine R.Trubach, B.Dehermendzhy and K.Ametov to 3 years, and Asan Chapukh to 3.5 years of suspended sentence; detained the Crimean Tatar activist R.Aivazov at the "Kalanchak" entry-exit checkpoint; denied proper medical assistance to disabled E.Bekirov putting his life in danger and prolonged the period of detention of V.Balukh in violation of Russia's own legislation. We strongly condemn these actions and demand the immediate release of all Ukrainian political prisoners held by Russia under fabricated charges. Consistent focus of the OSCE institutions and executive structures is needed to address these challenges. In this context, we welcome the statement of the OSCE RFOM H.Désir of 17 April, in which he underscored the unacceptability of the practice of silencing critical voices in Crimea.

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.