



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International
Organizations in Vienna

Statement in response to the CiO Special Representative in Ukraine and the TCG Heidi Grau and the SMM Chief Monitor Yaşar Halit Çevik

As delivered by Ambassador Yevhenii Tsymbaliuk,
Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,
to the 1274th meeting of the Permanent Council,
9 July 2020

Mr. Chairman,

We join other delegations in welcoming Special Representative Heidi Grau and Chief Monitor Halit Çevik back to the Permanent Council. We thank both speakers for presenting their reports, which inform on the situation on the ground and highlight the current state of negotiations between Ukraine and Russia.

In the past couple of months, which passed since the last presentation of reports by Ambassadors Grau and Cevik, we have not witnessed major changes in Russia's position regarding its role and responsibility as a party to the bilateral conflict. It continues to vehemently deny illegal occupation of Crimea and cowardly hide behind its proxies in Donbas, pushing forward the so-called "direct dialogue" with them.

This policy severely undermines the effectiveness of consultations within the Trilateral Contact Group and its Working Groups, as time and efforts are wasted on formalities rather than substantial discussions between the two parties to the conflict.

Regarding the Russian propaganda narrative on the internal nature of the conflict in Donbas, it would be very interesting to hear the clear explanations by the Russian representative of the statements delivered yesterday by the Plenipotentiary representative of the Russian Federation to the TCG Mr. Boris Gryzlov, who stated that "as of today, in Ukraine two more states have been established".

I urge Ambassador Lukashevich to clarify if the yesterday's statement by Mr. Gryzlov means that the Russian Federation intends to withdraw from the Minsk Agreements. Or does it plan to recognize those occupied areas?

On numerous occasions we have stressed our principled position that Ukraine is ready to talk to its citizens living in the temporarily occupied territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, but not with those who hold Russian passports and have no legitimate right to represent the local Ukrainian population.

Such dialogue is being conducted inter alia through including the representatives of the temporarily occupied territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk region who were forced to leave those territories by the Russian occupational administration as advisers to the Ukrainian delegation to the TCG.

I would remind that the Minsk Agreements, signed by Russia, Ukraine and the OSCE as mediator, are ultimately aimed at withdrawal of Russia-led illegal armed formations from the territory of Ukraine, reinstatement of full control of the state border by the Government of Ukraine (de-escalation of the security situation on the ground), and introducing special order of local self-government in the certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine (political settlement).

These two main tracks should be accompanied by solving the most topical humanitarian and socio-economic issues.

The Ukrainian side remains committed to full implementation of the Minsk Agreements, including the Paris “Normandie” Summit Common Agreed Conclusions.

Such approach was clearly demonstrated during the TCG videoconference on July 8, 2020.

As a result, several important agreements were reached during these consultations.

Firstly, I mean the agreement to provide the security guarantees for the necessary works to eliminate the consequences of the fires in the Luhansk region and for the simultaneous opening of two additional entry-exit checkpoints in Zolote and Shchastia in the Luhansk region.

Secondly, the substantial progress in agreeing on the updated demining plan on the basis of the TCG decision on demining activities (dated March 3, 2016), which at this point includes the 13 areas around the EECPs and other critical infrastructure, as well as on Addendum to the TCG’s Framework decision on disengagement of forces and hardware.

Thirdly, the agreement to provide the name-lists of the identified detainees by July 10, 2020.

At the same time, unfortunately, no agreement was reached on the package of additional measures to consolidate the ceasefire, on three additional disengagement areas and on the practical ways to unblock the OSCE SMM’s activities in the temporarily occupied areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

In this regard, the Ukrainian side stands ready for another round of consultations at the next VTC of the TCG’s Working Group on Security Issues, which will take place on July 14, 2020.

Chief Monitor,

Let me thank you for all the efforts undertaken by the SMM to counter numerous challenges for the Mission’s operational posture caused by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and severe restrictions imposed by the Russian side in Donbas under its pretext.

We noted that the number of patrols in Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine in the reporting period decreased considerably less, than in other regions. This testifies to the SMM’s resolve to continue implementing its core function, that is providing participating States with the verified information on the security situation in the conflict-affected areas. It is also worth noting that the Mission prioritized night-time flights of long-range UAVs, which remained essential for disclosing Russia’s illegal military activities beyond the reach of the ground patrols.

Despite serious restrictions to its freedom of movement, 96 per cent of which took place in Russia-occupied parts of Donbas, the SMM managed to cover situation in and around the pilot disengagement areas, including fortification of Russia's former military positions inside Petrivske DA, and observe violations of the Minsk agreements on the withdrawal of heavy weapons, 79 per cent of which also occurred in Russia-occupied areas.

Albeit severely limited by the lack of personnel and Russia-imposed restrictions, the Mission observed vehicular activity including cargo trains and convoys of cargo trucks entering and exiting Ukraine, during night hours near the border with the Russian Federation in Donetsk and Luhansk regions, where there are no border crossing facilities. We appreciate persistent efforts of the SMM to enhance transparency in those border areas, despite the fact that the Mission's patrols were forced by the Russian proxies to leave on 12 occasions in the reporting period alone. In this vein, we also welcome the SMM's expressed resolve to continue seeking to expand its presence near non-government-controlled border areas and in other relevant areas to enable enhanced monitoring activities and reduced transit times.

As we have reiterated many times before, increased transparency at the border contributes to reduced hostilities along the contact line, which are fuelled by Russia's illegal supplies of military equipment, weapons and ammunition across the border. This also remains an essential step towards return of control of the Ukrainian-Russian border to the Government of Ukraine, a key element of the overall resolution of the conflict. Establishment of additional Working Group on border within the TCG would significantly facilitate implementation of this task.

In the past couple of months, we have also witnessed a number of Russia's steps aimed at further deepening divide between government-controlled and temporarily occupied parts of Donbas, which undermines future prospects of reintegration of certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine. The ongoing so-called "passportization" and involvement of the owners of these illegal Russian passports to the voting for constitutional amendments in Russia became another major breach of Ukraine's sovereignty.

In this regard, we thank the SMM for responding to our calls on monitoring and reporting on Russia's violations of Ukraine's sovereignty, such as imposition of Russian language, currency, laws and tax system in the occupied parts of Donbas. In its reports, the Mission has confirmed introduction of the so-called "regulations" to establish Russian as the only "official" language in non-government-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, including discontinuation of the Ukrainian language component of the school regular curricula as of September 2020. Earlier, the OSCE Coordinator in the TCG Economic Working Group Ambassador Brandenburg confirmed during the informal briefing on 8 June the introduction of Russian currency in the occupied parts of Donbas. The OSCE findings remain an essential tool of drawing attention of the wider international community to Russia's breaches of international law, Ukraine's sovereignty and the OSCE principles and commitments in the temporarily occupied parts of my country. We call on the SMM to continue its work in this direction and provide regular reports to participating States.

In closing, let me again remind the SMM that its mandate covers entire territory of Ukraine, including the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. We continue to believe that Russia's denial of access of the Mission to these occupied parts of Ukraine cannot serve as a pretext for ignoring this part of the SMM's mandate. While we are fully aware of the current operational constraints, which the Mission is facing, we reiterate our call to launch a remote human rights monitoring in Crimea, using in particular the methodology provided by the UN.

The urgency of such remote monitoring has once again became clear two days ago on 7 July, when a new wave of illegal searches and detentions of Crimean Tatars was carried out by the Russian occupation authorities in various districts of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. According to the available information, at least seven Ukrainian citizens were illegally detained following the searches – Emil Ziyadinov, Ismet Ibragimov, Alim Sufyanov, Seyran Khayretdinov, Oleksandr Sizikov, Vadym Bektemirov, and Zekyrya Muratov. The so-called “court” decided yesterday to arrest until 2 September Ismet Ibragimov, Vadym Bektemirov, and Zekyrya Muratov. One of the remaining four, a person with disability (blindness) Oleksandr Sizikov, was accused of possession of illicit literature. He was sent the same day by the so-called “court” under house arrest, also until 2 September. We ask the SMM to verify this information.

The same remains true for the situation in the Azov and Black Sea region, its militarization and impediment to navigation by the Russian Federation. As the discussions in the recent FSC meeting held on 27 May demonstrated, this region continues to face numerous security threats for many participating States present in it. We encourage the SMM to pay more attention to the consequences of such situation for Ukraine and its coastal regions.

I wish to thank again Ambassador Grau and Ambassador Çevik, as well as the entire SMM team, for their hard and dedicated work of contributing to peaceful resolution of the conflict, started by Russia, as well as to upholding the OSCE principles and commitments.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.