



**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 1271<sup>st</sup> meeting of the Permanent Council,  
11 June 2020

**Mr. Chairperson,**

This week, the meeting of the Trilateral Contact Group took place for the first time with participation of representatives of certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine, who were invited by the delegation of Ukraine to the TCG. Those are well-known journalists Denys Kazanskyi and Serhiy Harmash who were forced to leave Donetsk in 2014, and chairman of the International NGO "Luhansk Fellowship" Vadym Goran and well-known doctor Kostiantyn Libster on behalf of certain areas of Luhansk region. They will take part in the TCG meetings on a permanent basis.

I wish to stress that we are not trying to, let me quote the Russian delegation, "squeeze the representatives of certain areas of Donbas out of the negotiation process", end of quote. Just the opposite, we are bringing these representatives to the negotiating table. Russian citizens, members of the Russian occupation administration in Donbas, who have been present at negotiations in Minsk for 6 years, continue to take part in the meetings of the TCG and its Working Groups on behalf of the Russian side. At the same time, they do not represent local residents of certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine, with whom, according to the Minsk Package of Measures, questions related to political settlement, local elections and legislative amendments should be discussed. We need to hear instead the voices of people living under Russia's temporary occupation and those of IDPs who moved to the government-controlled parts of Ukraine since 2014.

We hope that the recent changes in the Ukrainian delegation to the TCG would facilitate negotiation process and push Russia to stop hiding behind its proxies in Donbas and to assume its role and obligations as a party to the conflict. Without this, any meaningful progress in peaceful resolution of Russia-initiated conflict remains elusive, not only on the political track, but on other tracks of the Minsk agreements as well, including in the fields of economy and ecology, as the recent informal briefing by Ambassador Brandenburg has clearly demonstrated. We thank the Albanian Chairmanship for organizing this briefing, which contributed to awareness of

participating States of a wide range of serious challenges stemming from Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine.

Again and again, we reiterate that Ukraine remains committed to peaceful politico-diplomatic resolution of the conflict. On 5 June, President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy had a phone conversation with Chancellor of Germany Angela Merkel, during which the leaders of the two countries emphasized their commitment to the diplomatic path. The Head of Ukrainian State stressed the need to ensure free access of the ICRC and the SMM to the occupied parts of Donbas and expressed hope that effective implementation of the agreements reached last year in Paris would pave the way to the next summit in Berlin.

Despite our joint efforts together with partners to revitalize the Normandy format and achieve peace, we see no mutual constructiveness from the Russian side so far. This has been underlined by Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba. Last week, at least 9 Ukrainian soldiers were wounded at the frontline. Fighting in Donbas continues.

The Russian side maintains its support of the illegal armed formations. Uncontrolled segment of the Ukrainian-Russian state border continues to be used for night crossings of the convoys on the dirt roads with no official border crossing points present. Some of these supplies were spotted by the SMM even despite numerous severe restrictions and impediments to its activities, imposed by the Russian side. Last week, the Mission recorded convoys of trucks near Cheremshyne on 4 June, Hlynka on 5 June, as well as Manych and Stepne on the night of 7-8 June, illegally crossing the border. The photos provided by the SMM in the weekly report of 10 June speak for themselves.

Facts, established by the SMM, which testify to Russia's military activities in Donbas, continue to be very inconvenient for the Russian side. In two weeks after the Mission spotted the ongoing fortification of positions belonging to the Russian armed formations inside Petrivske disengagement area, the SMM camera located at that area was deliberately destroyed on 2 June. As we all heard on Monday during the SMM briefing, the shots from small arms were fired from the immediate vicinity of the camera, leaving no doubts on who was responsible for that. On 4 June, an SMM mini-UAV flying over areas to the east of Petrivske was fired by the Russian proxies. These deliberate actions demonstrate Russia's attitude towards implementation of the N4 arrangements and Minsk agreements, as well as its unchanged willingness to undermine SMM's monitoring capacities.

We again urge the Russian side to immediately lift all restrictions to the SMM activities, including the de-facto ban on crossing the contact line for the Mission's patrols. We thank Chief Monitor for reminding during the briefing on 8 June that the SMM has been completely exempt from COVID-19 related restrictions by the Government of Ukraine, in accordance with the Mission's mandate. It is high time for Russia to start acting likewise.

On 10 June, the Ukrainian side reopened two out of five entry-exit checkpoints at the contact line in Donbas for civilians crossing. Persons entering the government-controlled areas are obliged to observe 14 days self-isolation at home or observation in designated places as a part of wider efforts to counter COVID-19 pandemic. Those who cross the contact line to apply for admission to higher education and persons

accompanying them are exempt from these obligations. We regret that the Russian occupation administration refused to open EECPs on its part of the contact line, making people to return back.

The Russian side continues its efforts to separate occupied parts of Donbas from the rest of the territory of Ukraine. As confirmed by Ambassador Brandenburg during the briefing, it has introduced its own currency in those areas, replacing Ukrainian hryvnia. Last week, the Russian occupation administration in Luhansk cancelled, according to some reports, the status of Ukrainian language in certain areas of Luhansk region, switching to the Russian one. This followed similar action undertaken three months ago in the occupied parts of Donetsk region, to which we have already drawn the attention of participating States. In his last report to the Permanent Council on 23 April, Chief Monitor informed that the SMM, I quote, “continued to monitor issues related to language in non-government-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Specifically, it followed up on media reports, according to which on 6 March, those in control amended related “regulations” to establish Russian as the only official language”, end of quote. We ask the SMM to finalize this monitoring and to present its findings to the participating States in a written form.

The temporarily occupied Crimea remains a no-go area for the SMM, as the Russian Federation, in flagrant violation of the Mission’s mandate, continues to deny its access to the peninsula. In this way, it prevents the SMM from providing verified information on the dire situation with human rights and fundamental freedoms in Crimea. On 10 June, a number of authoritative Ukrainian human rights NGOs published the joint list of 94 Kremlin’s political prisoners illegally thrown behind bars in Crimea and in the territory of the Russian Federation. Out of them, 42 have already received so-called “sentences” under trumped-up charges. They include Crimean Tatars, journalists, human rights defenders, activists, Jehova’s Witnesses, and many others. The Russian occupation authorities continue to target those who demonstrate their support for victims of persecution, intimidating anyone opposing its illegal actions. Some Crimean Tatars were imprisoned because they had attended the court hearings in similar so-called “trials”, others received phone calls threatening that they would be the next to face arrest and imprisonment if they speak out in defense of those already arrested. We continue to severely condemn this deliberate campaign of intimidation in Russia-occupied Crimea.

The number of Ukrainian citizens illegally detained by the Russian side grows further. On 30 May, Ukrainian serviceman went missing close to the administrative boundary line between mainland Ukraine and occupied Crimea. As it became clear later, he was abducted by the Russian special service, which charged him with so-called “violation of the state border”. We demand the Russian side to immediately release him.

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, militants and their hardware from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and fully implementing its commitments under the Minsk agreements.

**Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.**