



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 1302nd meeting of the Permanent Council
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Madam Chairperson,

In previous weeks, we were witnessing growing aggressiveness of Russia in the international arena, as confidence towards the Russian authorities inside the country was falling. Russia's leadership continues denying any responsibility for its actions, be it fuelling violence and persecuting local population in the temporarily occupied parts of Ukraine, or massive detentions of its own citizens executing the right for peaceful assembly.

When other countries attempt to remind the Russian Federation of its international obligations, in response we hear only blaming someone else. When France and Germany as mediators in the "Normandie format" rightfully stress that it was Russia, which signed the Minsk agreements and became a party to the Trilateral Contact Group, they are falsely accused of misreading written documents. When the Swedish Chairpersonship of the OSCE reminds Russia that attempted annexation of parts of territory of another participating State represents flagrant violating of the OSCE core principles, Sweden is falsely blamed for undermining the role of the Chairpersonship. When participating States draw attention to the need to ensure freedom of peaceful assembly in Russia, the Russian delegation shows cartoon Star Wars movies to this distinguished audience.

We believe this must be stopped. Russia must demonstrate responsible behaviour and political will needed for compliance with the OSCE commitments.

This would significantly improve security in the entire OSCE area, including along the contact line in Donbas, where we continue to witness further degradation of the security situation.

We note the numbers provided by the SMM on the decrease of ceasefire violations last week. However, the most severe restrictions imposed by the Russian occupation authorities, which you are well aware of from the Mission's reports, prevent the SMM from drawing the full picture of the developments on the ground. The Mission is still forced to act as three operational entities, as the patrols are effectively prohibited to move across the line of contact and between the occupied parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine. In the last two weeks, the SMM faced 23 restrictions of its freedom of movement, all but two in the occupied parts of Donbas. Harsh winter conditions, only add to this precarious situation, in particular as regards the UAV flights. We cannot blame the Mission for this. Instead, it deserves our full support.

In these difficult circumstances, such flagrant violations by the Russian armed formations as the use of 120mm mortars on 8 February near Pivdenne or sniper fire taking the lives of Ukrainian militaries, regretfully, remain beyond the scope of SMM reports.

Last week, from 1 to 7 February, three Ukrainian servicemen were killed and 6 wounded, following enemy fire and mine explosions. Regular spikes of violence continue along the entire line of contact. Although its intensity remains far below of the previous years, the negative trend cannot be ignored. Today, we received reports of another Ukrainian serviceman killed in action and one wounded.

The humanitarian situation on the ground in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine remains precarious.

In the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, crossing the line of contact between the Russia-occupied parts and government-controlled areas remains a severe challenge for the civilians. Three months have passed since the EECPs near Zolote and Shchastia had to be fully functional. The Ukrainian government did its part, while the Russian side has only started it. The SMM observed containers, heavy equipment and construction activities near the checkpoint of the Russian armed formations south to Zolote. A big question is what prevented the Russian side from starting these preparations long ago?

Instead of providing free testing for COVID-19 in the existing EECPs, as the Government of Ukraine did, the Russian armed formations simply prevent civilians from crossing the line of contact. Meanwhile, the flow of people through the uncontrolled segment of the border with the Russian Federation remains unrestricted, forcing Ukrainian citizens to travel additional hundreds of kilometres and violating Ukraine's legislation by entering the occupied parts of Donbas through the officially closed border crossing points.

In Crimea, the ongoing pandemic does not prevent the Russian occupation authorities from persecuting local population. In January 2021, according to the data provided by the NGOs, 20 people were arrested, more than hundred were detained, and 13 political prisoners were illegally transferred to the territory of the occupying Power.

The Russian occupiers have also intensified criminal persecution of those unwilling to serve in the Russian Armed Forces. In January 2021 alone, 13 criminal cases were sent to the occupation courts. On 9 February, two more people were detained under these trumped-up charges, which, I remind to the Russian delegation, are totally illegal under the international humanitarian law.

Exercising such fundamental freedoms as freedom of media or freedom of expression remains very challenging in the temporarily occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. For instance, at least 25 Ukrainian widely visited web-sites are blocked in Crimea, as reported by the NGOs. The Russian radio channels are broadcast at the same frequencies used by Ukrainian ones, preventing Crimean residents from obtaining any information but controlled by the Russian government. The Russian occupiers continue to set up an information bubble in the occupied peninsula, trying to strengthen their stance among the local population. We call on the OSCE autonomous institutions to pay due attention to these efforts within their respective mandates.

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, Madam Chairperson.