



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International Organizations in Vienna

PC.DEL/367/16
18 March 2016

ENGLISH only

Statement on “Two years of illegal occupation of Crimea by Russia and its ongoing aggression against Ukraine”

As delivered by the Delegation of Ukraine
to the 1093rd meeting of the Permanent Council,
17 March 2016

Mr. Chairman,

In this period exactly two years ago Moscow orchestrated the so-called “referendum” in Ukraine’s Crimea, which was few weeks earlier illegally occupied by the Russian military forces. Following this unlawful “plebiscite” Moscow attempted annexation of this part of Ukraine’s territory – the first such attempt in Europe’s history since the end of the World War II.

Russia flagrantly violated its international legally-binding obligations and political commitments as well as bilateral and multilateral agreements and assurances, including the 1994 Budapest Memorandum on security assurances for Ukraine.

The Delegation of Ukraine reiterates in this regard that the Russian Federation’s acquisition by force of parts of the territory of Ukraine is legally null and void. Ukraine denies any sovereignty of the Russian Federation over parts of its territory, which remain illegally occupied by Russia. We highly value the united and resolute position of the international community in supporting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders, including by adopting the UN General Assembly Resolution “Territorial integrity of Ukraine” on 27 March 2014.

Russia’s claims that no blood was shed when occupying Ukraine’s peninsula are not true. There were killed among the Ukrainian servicemen. Tortured to death was the Crimean Tatar activist Reshat Ametow, kidnapped by pro-Russian paramilitary group “Crimean Self-Defense”. Despite the video evidence of his abduction registered the faces of kidnappers, they remain unpunished. No progress has been made in establishing the fate of about 20 Crimean Tatars, who disappeared on the peninsula since the start of illegal occupation. Our numerous requests to the Russian Federation for update on these cases, including those made in this hall, remain unanswered.

As registered by international organizations and human rights defenders, a two-year illegal occupation of Crimea has led to a dramatic deterioration of human rights situation on the peninsula, marked with systemic violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms and repressive policy of the Russian occupation authorities,

targeting mostly, but not merely, the Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian communities. An “atmosphere of impunity and fear” – this is how the Human Rights Watch experts recently assessed the current situation on the occupied peninsula.

We urge Russia to respond to calls of the international community and stop all human rights violations, as well as to allow access of international observers to permanently monitor the situation on the peninsula.

Distinguished colleagues,

At the last Normandy Ministerial meeting in Paris on 3 March the Ministers agreed on the urgent need to establish a comprehensive and sustainable ceasefire in Donbas which is another area of intervention from Russia.

Two weeks after, the combined Russian-separatist forces continue to fail to comply. Instead, the Russian commanders of the so-called “1st Army Corps” have formed a special attack tactical group of 800 fighters and enhanced with the heavy weapons, including tanks, 122 mm and 152 mm caliber artillery, 82 mm and 120 mm caliber mortars and MRLS “GRAD”. These weapons have been actively used to attack the Ukrainian positions near Avdiyivka and civilian infrastructure in the city. For instance, in its report of 10 March the SMM referred to the fresh craters in Avdiyivka, caused by five 120 mm mortar rounds. In the same report the Mission informed of two self-propelled 122 mm howitzers “Gvozdika”, spotted by the UAV in occupied Yasynivka while firing in a westerly direction. The next day the SMM registered another impacts while in Avdiyivka. On 10 March the SMM registered in “DPR”-controlled Mykolayivka the impact of shelling from direction of “DPR”-controlled areas.

Provocations and shellings near Avdiyivka are registered almost on a daily basis with an average of about 30 cases per day. They again lead to destruction of the critical infrastructure of the region. Since 13 March the Donetsk filtration station near Avdiyivka has stopped its work. Despite agreement, reached at the last meeting of the TCG Working Group on social and humanitarian issues, the area around the filtration station remains under militants’ fire. We caution Russia about the disastrous effect, including epidemics, that the damage to this station can have as 400 000 people depend on its water supply.

Situation near Avdiyivka remains a matter of our particular concern, however it has not been the only hotspot in Donbas over the past week. The geographical scope of militants’ provocations remains extremely broad and covers the most part of the line of contact, including Svitlodarsk, outskirts of Horlivka, Zaytseve, Mayorsk, Verkhnyotoretske, Opytne, Pisky, Luhanske, Novhorodske, Maryinka, Krasnohorivka, Novozvanivka and Novotoshkivske.

Between 10 and 15 March 298 cases of ceasefire violations by the combined Russian-separatist forces led to new casualties in the affected areas, leaving 3 Ukrainian soldiers killed and 24 wounded.

The Ministers in Paris agreed on the need to ensure full freedom of movement and access of the OSCE SMM. However, the Mission continues to report about significant restrictions to its freedom of movement in the occupied part of Donbas. This was again confirmed by the Deputy Chief Monitor A.Hug at his briefing in Vienna on 15 March. The SMM cannot conduct due monitoring at the border between Ukraine and the Russian Federation despite the importance of this function for de-escalation. Even the limited number of visits to the border remains, as reported by the SMM, strictly conditioned and closely controlled. At the same time, resupplies of manpower, weaponry and ammunition continue to be directed from Russia into Donbas, thus fuelling the conflict. It was reported yesterday that an echelon had arrived to the train station of Illovaysk, loaded with ammunition for small arms and artillery and mortars.

In this regard, we reiterate that when signing the Minsk Agreements Ukraine and the Russian Federation committed to creating a security zone in border areas of both countries, with the OSCE permanent monitoring and verification at the Ukrainian-Russian border. This agreed provision must be realized without further delay. We consider establishment of the SMM Forward Patrol Bases and patrol hubs close to the border, able to monitor the uncontrolled sections of the border and adjacent areas, including BCPs, roads and railways, as well as enhancing SMM's technical capacities as necessary concrete steps towards establishment of a security zone from the Ukrainian part of the border.

We also encourage the implementation of pertinent proposals, elaborated by the OSCE Secretariat upon the request of the OSCE Chairmanship, that would allow establishment of a security zone in border areas of Russia as Moscow undertook to deliver.

It was also agreed in the Normandy format in Paris that the present restrictions on operation of the international humanitarian organizations in the occupied part of Donbas must be lifted, the ICRC must have access to hostages and illegally detained persons. As this has not happened two weeks after the meeting, we reiterate our call on Russia to promptly take necessary steps to ensure implementation of this agreement. We also urge Russia to speed up the release of hostages and illegally detained persons on the basis of "all-for all" principle, as agreed in Minsk. The relevant provision of the Minsk Package of measures must be fully applied to the Ukrainians, held behind bars in Russia as political prisoners.

Mr.Chairman,

Yesterday the President of Ukraine enacted the Concept of Development of the Sector of Security and Defense of Ukraine, which identifies as the main security threat for Ukraine the on-going Russian aggression against Ukraine in Crimea and Donbas, as well as Moscow's unabated attempts to destabilize internal political and economic situation in my country. These are the new challenging realities for us to which we must adjust and which undermine the security of the entire region.

In light of the ongoing Russia's aggression it remains critical to maintain international unity and sanctions imposed on the Russian Federation until Moscow fully delivers on its commitments on peaceful resolution as well as reverses its aggressive course against Ukraine and the core principles of international law.

We reiterate our persistent call on the Russian Federation to immediately take practical steps to implement its Minsk commitments on peaceful resolution in Donbas and to exert its influence on the militants it supports to do likewise. Until now this has not been happening.

We urge Russia to restore its respect for the norms of international law and the OSCE principles and commitments, to halt its aggression against Ukraine and reverse the illegal occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol.

Thank you, Mr.Chairman.