



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 1279th meeting of the Permanent Council

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Mr. Chairperson,

Six years after the Minsk Protocol was signed by Russia, Ukraine and the OSCE in its mediator role, the Protocol's first provision on the bilateral cessation of fire has finally been implemented in a comprehensive and sustainable manner. Six years were necessary for the Russian side to make this first step in fulfilling its commitments under the Minsk agreements. All these years, Ukrainian citizens have been dying, as the Russian leadership used escalation of violence in Donbas as a convenient tool of exerting pressure on Ukraine.

Since the most recent ceasefire, combined with the additional measures to strengthen it, entered into force on 27 July, the number of ceasefire violations, as confirmed by the SMM, has decreased significantly. While the Russian armed formations continue opening sporadic fire from small arms and grenade launchers, this has so far had provocative character, without deliberate targeting of Ukrainian military positions. Taking this into account, the Ukrainian servicemen do not deliver a response fire, strictly adhering to the agreed ceasefire.

The only exception to that is a regular use by the Russian armed formations of the RPG launchers for distance mining of the government-controlled territories with anti-personnel mines. On 25 August, two Ukrainian militaries were wounded as a consequence of mine explosion.

Apart from that, there have been no casualties among Ukrainian servicemen, no civilian casualties and no damage to civilian properties due to shelling or small-arms fire after 27 July. This is indeed a considerable achievement, which is long overdue. We are grateful to the OSCE and its participating States for the mediation efforts undertaken within the TCG to facilitate dialogue between Ukraine and Russia, as well as for all the support provided to the Special Monitoring Mission in implementing its mandate on the ground.

It is in this context and against this generally promising background that we were particularly alarmed by the undisguised threats of use of force against the Ukrainian troops that were made at the end of yesterday's TCG meeting. No concocted pretexts

or unjustified excuses should be used to undermine the hard-won ceasefire agreement and nascent prospects of a peaceful settlement in the region after six years of unending hostilities.

This is why the Head of the Ukrainian delegation in the TCG addressed a proposal to CiO Special Representative Amb. Heidi Grau to request the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to use its good offices and undertake an immediate check of all facts on the ground and report back on the allegations made and concerns expressed.

Let me stress, the Ukrainian side unequivocally condemns all threats and will not accept any ultimatums. Peace should remain our common goal and everything should be done to preserve the ceasefire. We kindly ask the Chairmanship to assist us in resolving this situation and support our proposal.

Mr. Chairperson,

Our efforts should not stop. The recent tangible improvement of the security situation in Donbas can become sustainable and irreversible only if all the security provisions of the Minsk agreements are fulfilled. Until the Russian forces remain in the temporarily occupied parts of Donbas and illegal military supplies continue through the uncontrolled segment of the Ukrainian-Russian state border, this period of calm on the contact line can be easily reverted back to the previous level of fighting.

In the four weeks, which passed since the start of ceasefire, the SMM has counted 137 weapons in violation of their withdrawal lines, almost all of them [124] in the Russia-occupied parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine. These numbers are significantly lower than those observed before 27 July, but they still remind us that the heavy weapons, abundantly supplied by Russia to its proxies in Donbas during last six years, have not gone away.

Moreover, the Russian Federation has not stopped its support to its armed formations even during the ceasefire. The SMM alone, although severely restricted by the Russian armed formations in the border areas, spotted military-type trucks, minivans, vehicles and cargo trains illegally crossing the Ukrainian-Russian border near Voznesnivka, Manych and Mykyshivka. On 30 July and 27 August, two more so-called “humanitarian convoys” arrived in Ukraine from Russia in violation of the norms and principles of international law, bilateral treaties, Ukrainian legislation and earlier agreed modalities of delivery of humanitarian convoys. They include in particular an escort by the ICRC and passing of legal customs and border checks by the respective Ukrainian authorities. We do not understand what prevents Russia from following this way, as other participating States do, to whom we express our gratitude for the humanitarian support to the population on the ground.

Mr. Chairperson,

We are currently in the very beginning of a long path of peaceful politico-diplomatic resolution of the situation in Donbas, caused by Russia’s armed aggression. This path must end with local elections in the certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine following their de-occupation by Russia, restoration full control over Ukraine’s border, return of IDPs, Ukrainian political parties and media, and establishment of proper environment and legal field for holding such elections in

accordance with Ukrainian legislation and the OSCE standards, as envisaged by the Minsk agreements.

The fact that these conditions have so far been not met, neither in Donbas nor in Crimea, prompted the Ukrainian Parliament to exclude these territories of Ukraine, temporarily occupied by Russia, from the regular local elections to be held in Ukraine on 25 October 2020, as envisaged in the respective Resolution, adopted by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine on 15 July 2020.

As the Russian side has in fact blocked after that any meaningful discussions within the TCG Political Working Group, the Ukrainian delegation in the TCG has again demonstrated its constructive approach and submitted a letter to the Verkhovna Rada to consider compliance of the abovementioned Resolution with the Law of Ukraine “On special order of local self-governance in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions” and the Minsk Package of Measures.

On 26 August, the Parliamentary Committee on State Building, Local Governance, Regional and Urban Development held a special meeting to discuss this proposal. As a result of the meeting, a decision was taken to establish a working group, which will draft the bills related to the implementation of the Minsk agreements.

First Deputy Head of the Ukrainian delegation to the TCG Oleksiy Reznikov has confirmed in this regard Ukraine’s position that the local elections in the occupied parts of Donbas can be held only after withdrawal of the illegal armed formations, disarmament and demilitarization.

Overall, the issue of ongoing militarization by Russia of the territories it had occupied in Ukraine remains one of the most critical in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and its security implications for the wider OSCE area. Illegal military drills and parades, which continued in July and August this year in the temporarily occupied Crimean peninsula, served as reminder of a deliberate policy of the Russian Federation aimed at strengthening its military capacities in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov at the expense of Ukraine’s sovereignty and security of other littoral States. As in the past, we severely condemn these actions by the aggressor State and urge Russia to immediately stop them.

The situation with human rights and fundamental freedoms in the occupied Crimean peninsula only gets worse.

At the last meeting of the Permanent Council before the Summer Recess, we drew attention of the participating States to the pressure exerted by the Russian occupation authorities on the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in Crimea, in particular to the order to demolish a temple in Yevpatoria, construction of which started well before 2014. On 4 August, another decision was taken by the occupation authorities, which in fact called into question the very existence of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in Crimea, as its religious community was denied access to the Cathedral of the Saint Volodymyr and Olha in Simferopol. As stressed by the MFA of Ukraine in its statement of 5 August, persecution of the Ukrainian Orthodox community in Crimea is aimed at erasing Ukrainian identity in the temporarily occupied territories and represents a part of a wider policy of oppressing all religious communities, not controlled by Moscow, including in the first place Crimean Muslims, as well as such communities as Jehovah Witnesses and others.

On 30 August, we marked the International Day of Victims of Enforced Disappearances. The fate of dozens of Crimean residents, who went missing or were directly abducted by the Russian security services and paramilitary units, serves as a sad reminder that this Day is not about ceremonial words. Especially for Ukraine. Many facts of enforced disappearances of Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar activists in the occupied Crimea were reflected in the application of Ukraine instituting proceedings against the Russian Federation in the case of violation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination by the Russian side, submitted to the International Court of Justice in 2017.

Pressure and persecution of the dissenting voices in the temporarily occupied Crimean Peninsula continue without stopping. On 31 August, yet another wave of illegal searches and detentions of Crimean residents took place. According to the available information, following searches in their houses, four Crimean Tatars were detained. They were released in the night following their detention, but they still face criminal prosecution. Currently, about 100 Ukrainian citizens remain in illegal custody. We call on the international community to remain seized of this matter and increase pressure on Russia to end its gross human rights violations in Crimea.

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.