



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International
Organizations in Vienna

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Statement on “Russia’s ongoing aggression against Ukraine and illegal occupation of Crimea”

As delivered by Ambassador Ihor Prokopchuk,
Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,
to the 1216th meeting of the Permanent Council,
7 February 2019

Mr. Chairperson,

Last Friday, in the special PC meeting with participation of Ambassador Apakan and Ambassador Sajdik, we heard from the Russian delegation that it condemned any threats directed at the SMM monitors, any attempts to restrict their freedom of movement and any attacks on the Mission’s technical assets. What we witness on the ground, instead, is that such declarations of the Russian side are meaningless. In practice Russia continues to defy its responsibilities and commitments. This Monday, an SMM patrol came under fire of the Russian armed formations while being positioned near a checkpoint of the Ukrainian Armed Forces close to Zolote. A day before, the Russian proxies again denied the SMM passage through Bezimenne, citing “orders from their superior”, and urged the SMM to leave the Chervona Mohyla railway station in Voznesenivka, where the Mission observed more than 40 cargo rail cars with unknown content. At border crossing points, the Russian armed formations continue to deny the SMM access, stating that the Mission “does not have permission” to be present there. At schools in the occupied parts of Donbas, the same “permission” is demanded by the Russian proxies to visit the respective facilities.

We all know why the Russian side continues to impose these severe restrictions on the SMM freedom of movement and intimidate civilian unarmed monitors, sometimes putting their lives at direct risk, as was the mentioned case near Zolote. These restrictions greatly undermine the Mission’s ability to implement its mandate in full on gathering information and reporting on the security situation and alleged violations of fundamental OSCE principles and commitments in the area of its operation. Russia’s actions, aimed at “blinding” SMM, constitute a gross violation of the Mission’s mandate. It is no surprise that the most systematic and persistent restrictions take place in the border areas of Ukraine, which are occupied by the Russian Federation. Illegal supplies of Russian weapons and ammunition continue: only in the first three weeks of January, 127 cisterns with fuel and lubricants were spotted to arrive to the occupied Rovenky, Simeikyne and Chervona Mohyla to replenish supplies of the Russian armed formations in Donbas. On 3 February, the SMM saw “a mobile jamming communication system assessed as R-330ZH

“ZHITEL” entering a compound in Luhansk city”. This modern Russian system of electronic warfare can be used for putting interferences to the signals of SMM UAVs, which the Chair mentioned in his introduction to this debate. This system is one of thousands of pieces of weapons and military equipment that Russia has undertaken to withdraw from the Ukrainian territory, but did not. This spotting adds to numerous previous cases when the Russian sophisticated weapons were registered by the Mission in the Russia-occupied parts of Donbas. Direct link between Russia’s control of a part of the state border with Ukraine and the ongoing violence along the contact line in Donbas has been established long ago. Until the full control of the state border by the government of Ukraine is reinstated throughout the conflict area, the Kremlin will keep sending new troops, weapons and ammunition to fuel this violence.

The ongoing Russian aggression against Ukraine continues to bring dire humanitarian impact upon the local population residing in the conflict-affected area. In the last PC meeting, much attention was focused on the suffering of people forced to wait for many hours in long queues created by the Russian armed formations at the entry-exit checkpoints along the contact line, with the situation being aggravated by severe winter conditions. We have not registered any significant changes for the better: the SMM continues to report on thousands of people queuing to travel toward government-controlled areas in Stanytsia Luhanska, Kreminets and Olenivka, with no people queueing in the opposite direction. While the Ukrainian authorities undertook concrete steps to improve infrastructure to avoid queues, no steps were made by the Russian armed formations. We reiterate our call on the Russian Federation, as the occupying power, to fulfil its obligations under international humanitarian law.

The situation in the occupied Crimea remains a serious concern. Russia continues its militarization of peninsula by reinforcing its military units, air and naval forces, bringing new pieces of heavy weapons and holding regular military exercises. Since February this year, a so-called “military-patriotic centre” was established in the occupied city of Sevastopol by the decision of the Russian Minister of Defense. Basic military training will be provided for juveniles, contributing to the climate of militarisation cultivated by Kremlin for generating public support of its aggression against sovereign countries. In the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait, illegal impediments to freedom of international navigation for Ukrainian and foreign ships continue, causing further losses for Ukrainian ports and coastal areas. As estimated by the Ministry of Infrastructure of Ukraine, these losses reached last year almost 400 mln USD.

24 Ukrainian servicemen captured by the Russian Federation in its act of armed aggression against Ukraine near the Kerch Strait remain in illegal custody of the Russian authorities. Russia continues to ignore the calls of the international community and to violate its international obligations on their treatment as prisoners of war. The Russian side refuses to provide information on the real current state of their health. Tomorrow, on 8 February, Ukrainian journalist Roman Sushchenko and Ukrainian citizen, Crimean resident Volodymyr Balukh, will celebrate again their birthdays in Russian prison. They are among dozens of Ukrainian citizens illegally held by Russia under trumped-up charges in Russia and Russia-occupied Crimea. Pavlo Hryb and Edem Bekirov, disabled Ukrainian citizens, remain without special medical treatment they need on the daily basis. We again urge Russia to immediately

and unconditionally release Ukrainian citizens and call upon the international community to strengthen its pressure on Russia to let it happen.

We urge the Russian Federation to reverse its illegal occupation of Crimea and to stop its aggression against Ukraine, including by withdrawing its armed formations from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and fully implementing its commitments under the Minsk agreements.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.