



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 1266th meeting of the Permanent Council,
7 May 2020

Mr. Chairperson,

Ukraine continues to seek ways to resolve the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, demonstrates constructive approach and expects similar approach in response. This was stressed by Foreign Minister Kuleba following the most recent Normandy Four Ministerial videoconference held last Thursday. The meeting, which took place after almost a two-year break, allowed to share views between parties to the conflict, with Germany and France as mediators, on the current state of play in implementation of the Minsk agreements and N4 arrangements.

The Ukrainian side reiterated the urgent need to fulfil security provisions of the Minsk agreements as a key prerequisite for sustainable de-escalation and progress on other tracks of peaceful resolution. Establishment of a sustainable and comprehensive ceasefire and restoration of control of the border by the Government of Ukraine, including the establishment of additional working group on restoration of border control, remain essential to stop armed violence in Donbas.

Participants of the meeting recognized the progress on the mutual release of detainees, and Minister Kuleba urged the Russian side to release all illegally detained Ukrainian citizens, including those held in Russia and in the territory of occupied Crimea, in particular having in mind the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Special attention was paid to the necessity of full and unconditional access of the SMM, ICRC and other international monitoring and humanitarian bodies to the occupied parts of Donbas, which the Russian side must ensure. We hope the next ministerial meeting, planned to take place in a month, will be a further step towards peaceful politico-diplomatic resolution of the conflict, which is long overdue.

With the aim to accelerate this process, the Ukrainian side has significantly strengthened the composition of its delegation to the Trilateral Contact Group. On 5 May, President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed the relevant decree. Former President of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma remained at the head of delegation, while Deputy Prime Minister – Minister for Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine Oleksiy Reznikov and Chairman of Ukrainian Parliament's Committee on Foreign Policy and Interparliamentary Cooperation Oleksandr

Merezhko became First Deputy and Deputy Heads of the delegation, respectively. Two Chairmen of Parliament's Committees and two Deputy Ministers were appointed as Representatives of Ukraine to the respective Working Groups. Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine Andriy Yermak emphasized that the process of resolving the situation in Donbas is complicated, and therefore must be continued without interruption, so Ukraine wants to take a tougher and more proactive position.

In this regard, we expect that the Russian representation in the TCG and its working subgroups will also be reinforced.

We appreciate OSCE's role as mediator in the Trilateral Contact Group. It remains essential for improvement of security and humanitarian environment in Donbas, which regrettably continues to be marked by systematic failure of the Russian side to implement its commitments under the Minsk agreements and N4 arrangements. Let me cite a few examples.

On 30 April, the SMM saw four self-propelled howitzers in violation of withdrawal lines firing from Russia-occupied areas, 2km east of Berdianka, to government-controlled areas of Luhansk region (the images of this shelling taken by an SMM UAV can be found in its weekly report distributed yesterday). On 2 May, the Russian armed formations used an UAV in violation of para 7 of the Minsk Memorandum to drop a grenade on the Ukrainian military positions, leaving one serviceman wounded. On 4 May, they fired S-8 unguided aviation rocket from the direction of Russia-occupied Verkhniostyrovivske settlement against government-controlled Pavlopil settlement, a few dozen meters from residential buildings, continuing the practice of intimidating civilians and using them as a human shield. On 5 May, the Russian proxies fired mortars to Petrivske disengagement area.

Let me draw your attention to the issue of systematic denials of access for the SMM patrols at checkpoints of the Russian armed formations along official crossing routes in Donbas starting from March 21, 2020. We continue to condemn these flagrant violations of the Mission's mandate and the Minsk agreements by Russia, and we call on the participating States to sustain persistent pressure on Russia to immediately lift these restrictions. As the Russian proxies prevent, in particular, the SMM monitors from travelling towards government-controlled areas, citing that, I quote, "the SMM did not have permission to pass", end of quote, this may have serious consequences for the health and life of monitors in critical situations.

In this regard, I would like to underline two important points:

- firstly, the Government of Ukraine fully respects the policies of the OSCE SMM and its Chief Monitor Ambassador Cevik, as well as the practical measures taken by the Mission in countering the threats, related to pandemic COVID-19, in particular regarding the protection of the SMM monitors' physical health;
- secondly, the Ukrainian side will not discuss the essence of the so-called "seven-demand Rules of OSCE SMM's access to CADR and CALR", pushed forward by the Russian Federation and its proxies within the Trilateral Contact Group, as long as we adhere to the principled position that neither side has the right to infringe upon the SMM's freedom in executing its mandate. Nevertheless, we would be ready to hear the practical steps

to ensure OSCE SMM's safe and secure access throughout Ukraine, in particular in the temporarily occupied areas.

Remedying this situation requires consolidated international pressure on Russia. On 30 April, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (Ukraine's Parliament) adopted its Address to the parliaments of foreign states and parliamentary assemblies of international organizations regarding the condemnation of the ongoing armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, the illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol and the occupation of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, political repressions against citizens of Ukraine and the release of political prisoners – citizens of Ukraine. The title of this Address speaks for itself.

Political repressions against Ukrainian citizens are not empty words. In Crimea, the Russian occupation authorities keep behind bars a number of Crimean Tatars charged based on trumped-up allegations without proper medical assistance. Some of them face involuntary placement in psychiatric institutions. Others are forcibly transferred from Crimea to the Russian Federation, in violation of international humanitarian law, which prohibits forcible transfers of protected persons from occupied territory to the territory of the occupying Power. Human rights defenders and lawyers receive so-called “anti-extremist warnings” to prevent them from providing assistance to the persecuted persons.

On 3 May, we marked the World Press Freedom Day. This reminds us of persistent efforts by the Russian occupation authorities to curtail the freedom of speech in Crimea by violating the rights of journalists and freedom of the press. Crimean Tatar journalists Remzi Bekirov, Osman Arifmemetov, Rustem Sheikhaliyev, Nariman Memedinov and civil rights activist Server Mustafayev remain in illegal custody of the Russian side. Since 2014, when Russia occupied Crimea, out of three thousand media, which worked in the peninsula, only 232 were allowed to re-register under the occupation. Any alternative views and dissenting voices are silenced.

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.