



# General Assembly

Seventy-third session

**67**<sup>th</sup> plenary meeting  
Wednesday, 20 February 2019, 10 a.m.  
New York

Official Records

*President:* Ms. Espinosa Garcés. . . . . (Ecuador)

*The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.*

## Agenda item 140 (continued)

### Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/73/722 and A/73/722/Add.1)

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): Before proceeding to the items on our agenda, I would like, in keeping with established practice, to draw the attention of the General Assembly to documents A/73/722 and A/73/722/Add.1. Document A/73/722 contains a letter dated 24 January 2019 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly, in which he informs the Assembly that eight Member States are in arrears in the payment of their financial contributions to the United Nations, within the terms of Article 19 of the Charter.

I would like to remind delegations that, under Article 19 of the Charter,

“A Member of the United Nations which is in arrears in the payment of its financial contributions to the Organization shall have no vote in the General Assembly if the amount of its arrears equals or exceeds the amount of the contributions due from it for the preceding two full years. The General Assembly may, nevertheless, permit such a Member to vote if it is satisfied that the failure to pay is due to conditions beyond the control of the Member.”

In document A/73/722/Add.1, dated 18 February 2019, the Secretary-General informs the President of the General Assembly that, since the issuance of his communication contained in document A/73/722, Viet Nam has made the necessary payment to reduce its arrears below the amount specified in Article 19 of the Charter.

May I therefore take it that the General Assembly takes note of the information contained in documents A/73/722 and A/73/722/Add.1?

*It was so decided.*

### Address by Mr. Petro Poroshenko, President of Ukraine

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of Ukraine.

*Mr. Petro Poroshenko, President of Ukraine, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.*

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Petro Poroshenko, President of Ukraine, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

**President Poroshenko:** I would like to start by expressing my gratitude to the President of the General Assembly, Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, for her leadership in steering the work of the main policymaking and representative organ of the United Nations.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (<http://documents.un.org>).



Today marks the fifth anniversary of the start of the foreign military aggression against my country, Ukraine. I would like to express my gratitude to the General Assembly, which over the past five years has taken a strong stand in its support for Ukraine and in opposing the aggression against it and its occupation.

Five years ago, hundreds of innocent lives — not only of Ukrainians but also of Belarusians, Armenians, Jews and many others — were lost in the name of Ukraine's independence, dignity and freedom. After the loss of the heavenly 100 in Kyiv, the General Assembly adopted resolution 68/262, on the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine, with 100 members voting in favour. It was not only symbolic; it was the right thing to do. The Assembly demonstrated its meaningful role in the discussion of questions related to the maintenance of international peace and security.

Every year that I have come to address the General Assembly at its annual session, I have felt its great sympathy for the Ukrainian people, a sympathy underpinned by absolutely practical steps. Such was the case when the General Assembly, without losing any time, adopted resolution 68/262, of 27 March 2014, reiterating Ukraine's sovereignty within internationally recognized borders. That was a timely reaction to Russia's illegal attempts to redraw European borders through its illegal annexation of Crimea.

Such was also the case when, for a third year in a row, the General Assembly adopted a resolution (resolution 73/263) on the situation of human rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine. It is unbelievable for many people, but that resolution recognizes Russia — a permanent member of the Security Council — as an occupying Power.

Such was again the case when, just a few months ago, the General Assembly supported Ukraine's request and adopted resolution 73/194, condemning the militarization of Crimea, the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov.

I am grateful to the General Assembly for maintaining such close attention to Ukraine and our region, in which Russia is becoming extremely aggressive, both on land and at sea. The ability of the United Nations to properly address this challenge will, without any doubt, have a direct impact on the future of the rules-based international order. Today's consideration by the General Assembly of a new

agenda item — “Situation in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine” — is clear testimony of the Assembly's readiness to address pressing issues.

On this very day — 20 February — in 2014 Russia started its covert military invasion of Ukraine, in clear violation of the norms and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. The war claimed its first victim on 3 March 2014 — Reshat Ametov, a Crimean Tatar. He had embarked upon a peaceful one-man protest against the aggression. The Russians detained, tortured and murdered him. The cause of death was a stab in the eye. That was just the beginning of the horror in Russian-occupied Crimea.

Just think about that — for five years the Ukrainian people have been living through the longest hot conflict in Europe in modern history. Russia started a war against its neighbour, whom it calls its brotherly neighbour, and it shows no intention of stopping. We are losing our best sons and daughters almost every day. That is what my heart bleeds for on any given day. That is what I will never be able to accept.

First Russia grabbed Crimea, and then it turned Donbas into a battlefield. It then continued its aggression in the Sea of Azov, the Black Sea and the Kerch Strait. As a result, 44,000 square kilometres — or 7 per cent — of Ukraine's territory, including Crimea and the eastern parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, are currently under occupation. Russian aggression has resulted in 13,000 people killed and more than 28,000 wounded. Those numbers include the 298 passengers of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH-17, which was shot down in July 2014 by the Russian military using a BUK missile system.

More than 1.8 million residents of Crimea and Donbas have had to leave their homes owing to Russia's aggression and occupation. The once peaceful lives of the people of those regions have now turned into nightmares, marked by fear and terror. Yet they have never turned into a wave of immigrants or created the least problem for our European allies. We have managed to cope with the challenge and prove that the Government-controlled part of Ukraine is much more resilient and healthy than the occupied one.

As in any war, the first casualty of Moscow's aggression was the truth. The occupation started with the infamous little green men and the Kremlin's outright and shameful denial of its military involvement in the takeover of the Ukrainian Crimea. Instead, the

world and the public were fed lies about mythical local self-defence units, which somehow overnight became equipped with the latest Russian weaponry. Only later did the Russian President publicly admit that it had indeed been an operation by the Russian military.

Putin's confession makes the Russian narrative regarding the so-called local referendum an absolutely surreal one. The vote was held at gunpoint and it was nothing more than a part of Russia's aggressive plan. Let me repeat — the referendum in March 2014 was a fake. I witnessed it myself when I was in Crimea in late February 2014. I went alone, without any security, directly to the door of the Crimean Parliament, to talk and stop the farce. I saw for myself that it was encircled by the Russian military. The process had absolutely nothing to do with democracy or the free will of the people.

Russia also wanted to spread chaos throughout the eastern and southern regions of Ukraine. It was only the resistance of our people, who refused to be the victims of Russian rule, that stopped further occupation. Unfortunately, direct military intervention by Russian regular troops in Donbas has led to the occupation of parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

The war claimed its first victim in Donbas on 13 April 2014. His name was Gennady Bilichenko. He was a Ukrainian officer and part of a group that had strict orders not to respond to provocations. Back then, we entertained the illusion that war was still avoidable. That group was ambushed near the city of Slovyansk. Gennady died from gunfire. Six days later, the same Russian officers detained Volodymyr Rybak, a local politician in Horlivka who wanted only to raise the Ukrainian flag in his town. At his side was 19-year-old activist Yuriy Popravko. They tortured them, split open their stomachs and pushed them, while still alive, into the river.

That is how Russia's war in Donbas started. We know who did this. We know how they did this. The Kremlin continued to deny any involvement of the Russian military in the war in Donbas despite the overwhelming evidence proving the opposite. Only recently, 21 Russian military men, who were captured on the battlefield and are currently in Ukrainian custody, pleaded with President Putin to exchange them for Ukrainian political prisoners in Russia. The Kremlin has not reacted, showing just how little the

Russian authorities care about those whom they send to this undeclared war.

Five years into the conflict, Moscow continues to send its regular military forces and proxies to Donbas, which has literally become a production line for Russia's killing machine. As cynical as it is, they even send their young military cadets to Donbas to practise in the battlefield. In their mothers' place, I would ask the Russian President where their sons are.

Last November, Russian naval forces committed a direct, brutal and unprovoked attack on Ukrainian warships in the international waters of the Black Sea. Russia's actions fall exactly under the definition of aggression under resolution 3314 (XXIX) of 1974. As a result, the vessels were damaged and seized and 24 crew members, including three who were wounded, were captured and are now illegally detained in Russia. I want to stress that they are not criminals. They must be treated as prisoners of war under the Geneva Conventions. But Russia turns a deaf ear to the numerous calls for their immediate and unconditional release, including those of the Assembly set out in resolution 73/194, adopted last December.

Today I bring an appeal to the Secretary-General to bring pressure to bear on Moscow to release the Ukrainian crew members. It has been signed by thousands and thousands of Ukrainians in just the past few days, and I speak on their behalf. We sincerely count on the support of the Assembly. This is the appeal signed by Ukrainian leaders, and this is the list of signatures, which I brought to New York from Ukraine and I will now give to the Secretary-General.

Moscow's hybrid war also includes covert operations and hacker attacks against Ukrainian institutions and critical civilian infrastructure. That kind of Russian activity is by now well known far beyond Ukraine's borders. In addition, Russia is waging an unprecedented propaganda war against Ukraine — a war that actually started before the first victims died on Kyiv's central square, Maidan Nezalezhnosti.

Every day, with no pause or consideration for holidays or weekends, all of Russia's major television channels broadcast torrents of lies and fake news about Ukraine. Those lies especially target the population of the occupied territories, in which Ukrainian television and radio channels are being blocked. It is a virtual State-run hate machine, working 24/7.

Ukraine is topic number 1, topic number 2 and topic number 3 on Russian news and talk shows. They treat Ukraine as a domestic, and not a foreign, issue. Five years ago this war began under the pretext of defending Russian speakers in Ukraine. It continues now under the pretext of defending Orthodox believers. President Putin publicly confirmed his readiness to use military force for that purpose in response to Ukraine creating its own independent Orthodox Church.

While continuing its undeclared war against my country, the Kremlin keeps desperately trying to convince the international community that it is not a party to the conflict. It says that it is Ukraine's internal conflict, in which Russia is involved only as an objective and impartial mediator. It is a truly twisted reality that the Russian Federation tries to spread. Some may be tempted to go along with the Russian narrative for the sake of political convenience.

I stand here today to let those present know that we will not let the lies prevail. We will fight tooth and nail to prevent any and all attempts to present the Russian aggressive behaviour towards my country as anything other than what it actually is — a war waged in plain sight of the international community. Let us set the record straight once and for all. There is no so-called crisis in Ukraine and no internal conflict in Ukraine, but an ongoing military occupation and armed aggression by Russia against Ukraine.

It is noteworthy that the report of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court recognized the conflict in Crimea and Donbas as armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine and recognized Russia's attempted annexation of Crimea as an ongoing state of occupation. Those are the words of the Court. It is truly mind-boggling that, even after all those decisions, the Russian Federation is still trying to present itself as a peaceful State that fully implements its obligations under the Charter of the United Nations.

There are no so-called de facto authorities, but there is a Russian occupation administration in the temporarily occupied territories of Donbas and Crimea, as well as Russian State bodies and agencies that are in charge of administering those occupied territories. There are no rebels, but there are regular armed forces under the Defence Ministry and there are formations of special and secret services. There are no insurgents, but there are Russian advisers, instructors and irregular,

illegal armed groups created, equipped, funded and controlled by Russia.

For the Assembly's better understanding of the price paid by Ukraine for our freedom and democracy, I would like to share some figures that speak for themselves. As of February 2019 in the occupied Crimea, Russia has deployed an additional 32,500 military personnel, 88 artillery systems, 52 multiple-launch rocket systems, 372 armoured combat vehicles, 113 warplanes and 62 combat helicopters, as well as six combat ships and six submarine ships equipped with Kalibr sea-launched cruise missiles.

One cannot exclude the eventual deployment of nuclear weapons on the peninsula. The infrastructure is already there, and Russia has used the past five years to restore and modernize it. We are therefore witnessing an unprecedented militarization of the Black Sea area. Russia has changed the strategic balance in the region and well beyond its borders. It has turned Crimea into a launching pad for its missiles. Does anyone still have any illusions about why Russia has done everything to ruin the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty? Do not be naive: Russia transforms any land it grabs or takes under its control into a military base.

Russian armed formations now have 496 tanks in Donbas. That number is greater than that of Germany, France, Spain or Italy. Ukraine contains that Russian force, which also has 938 armoured combat vehicles, 128 multiple-launch rocket systems and 776 artillery systems, including self-propelled ones. It makes Ukraine a true eastern flank of NATO in defence of trans-Atlantic freedom and democracy.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) Special Monitoring Mission in Donbas on several occasions took video coverage last year of convoys of Russian military hardware illegally crossing the section of the Ukrainian-Russian border not controlled by the Ukraine authorities. Monitors also determined the presence in the occupied territory of the newest Russian systems of radio electronic warfare and radio intelligence, as well as electronic unmanned aerial vehicle jamming systems. Those systems have never been in the possession of the Ukrainian armed forces. There is only one country capable of producing and supplying them, and the name of that country is Russia.

To hide those illegal supplies, the Russian Federation simply blocks the monitoring activities of

the Special Monitoring Mission of the OSCE in the areas close to the temporarily uncontrolled segment of the State border. The Special Monitoring Mission also continues to be hampered by huge restrictions on its everyday activity in the occupied territory. I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to all nations that actively contribute to the work of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission.

Back to the figures — I have to underline that the overall number of illegal armed formations now stands at around 35,000 militants, along with 2,100 servicemen from Russian regular armed troops on our territory. The total number of the Russian armed forces along the Russian-Ukrainian border is over 87,000. Military experts would tell it straight — that an armed grouping at the Russian border with Ukraine is an offensive strike grouping that has nothing to do with defence. It is meant for a military strike. And that is what the Kremlin is preparing for. A further escalation to a full-scale war is therefore not an absolutely unrealistic prospect. That is why we should ensure comprehensive, real-time monitoring of the situation along the Russian-Ukrainian border. Knowing the aggressor as I know him, I would like to assure those present that, above all, he is afraid of transparency, public attention and the world knowing his plans.

The price we pay for the Russian adventure in Donbas is exacted in many ways and on many levels. Apart from the direct military consequences, Ukraine is now facing the most serious humanitarian challenges it has faced since it attained its independence. Critical infrastructure facilities, including electricity, gas and water supplies, which were damaged by shelling, require urgent repair. Civilians continue to face serious risks to their safety due to the saturation of land mines and other unexploded ordinance in occupied Donbas, which, according to the United Nations, has already become the most mine-contaminated area of land in the world.

To overcome the humanitarian consequences of the Russian military aggression, United Nations agencies have mobilized more than \$460 million over the past five years. We are very grateful for the assistance provided by our international partners to millions of people in need.

The economic and environmental damage caused by the Russian occupation is also immense. Imagine — 27 per cent of the industrial potential of

Donbas has been illegally moved to Russia, including the equipment of 33 local industrial giants. The remaining enterprises cannot be fully operational because of the lack of professional staff and financial resources and the loss of cooperation ties with other parts of Ukraine.

The ecological situation in the occupied Donbas is also deteriorating, in particular owing to the flooding of coal mines, which poses the risk of water contamination. There are a number of potentially dangerous objects near the line of contact, which, owing to regular shelling by armed formations of the Russian Federation, could become an epicentre of ecological and technological disaster — and that is only a partial list of the problems brought to our land by Russian aggression.

I would like to draw attention to the human rights situation in the Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine. The people — our citizens — continue to suffer from Russian aggression on a daily basis. Murder, torture, harassment, sexual violence, arbitrary detentions and arrests, enforced disappearances and the persecution of journalists, human rights activists and defenders, social media workers and bloggers have become a daily reality for the residents of the occupied territories. People live in fear of being labelled as extremists, terrorists or Ukrainian spies and risk being thrown behind bars or being abducted without leaving a trace. The occupation administration has introduced the disgraceful practice of extracting false confessions under torture in politically motivated prosecutions.

The free exercise of religion is also under threat there. Recently, the occupation authorities demanded the clearing of a church building in Simferopol that belonged to Ukrainian Orthodox worshippers for many years. The United Nations human rights monitoring mission in Ukraine, invited by the Government of Ukraine, continues to report a growing number of human rights violations and abuses in the temporarily occupied territories. The effective implementation of its mandate is hindered by Russia's continued denial of access by United Nations monitors to the occupied Crimea and parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

In April 2017, the International Court of Justice adopted an order for provisional measures in the case concerning the *Application of the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism and of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Ukraine v. Russian Federation)*. In its decision, the

Court urged Russia to refrain from maintaining or imposing limitations on the ability of the Crimean Tatar community to conserve its representative institutions, including the Mejlis, and to ensure the right of Ukrainian citizens to study the Ukrainian language. Like so many other decisions taken by this Organization, including those adopted by the Assembly, the Court's binding order remains unimplemented by the Russian Federation.

Issues related to the unlawful behaviour of Russia against Ukraine and its people are now being considered by the International Criminal Court, the International Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights and within the framework of arbitration proceedings under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. In that light, I highly appreciate the remarkable manifestation of support and solidarity with Ukraine throughout the world.

We also need to double down on seeking the release of the more than 70 Ukrainian hostages held in Russia and Crimea and on the exchange of detainees as envisaged by the Minsk arrangements. Only last year, Ukraine transmitted 13 proposals to Russia regarding a potential detainee swap. The Kremlin turned its back on all of them. I am convinced that, even though the Kremlin remains blind and deaf to international pressure and its inevitable responsibility for grave human rights violations, such pressure is the only way to stop Moscow's abuses in that sphere. I call upon all the countries of the Assembly to strengthen their efforts to demand respect for human rights by the Russian Federation, along with the unconditional release and return of all Ukrainian hostages and prisoners of war.

Ukraine is a peace-loving nation, with no expansionary plans or territorial claims. Not even an inch of Russia's sovereignty and territorial integrity was violated by us. Maintaining the utmost respect for the Charter of the United Nations and the OSCE Helsinki principles has been the foundation of our foreign policy since our independence. To underline the point, I would like to draw attention to the events of December 1994 in Budapest, when Ukraine gave up the third-largest nuclear arsenal in the world in exchange for security assurances. Our goodwill was repaid in 2014 by a stab in the back by one of the signatories of the Budapest Memorandum on security assurances — the Russian Federation. By resorting to military aggression against Ukraine, Russia violated every possible fundamental norm and principle of international law, including

the United Nations Charter, which entrusts Security Council members with upholding international peace and security, instead of unleashing conflict throughout the world.

What, therefore, can the international community do about Russia? In 1939, because of its aggressive behaviour, Moscow was expelled from the League of Nations — an appropriate and justified measure. Maybe it is time to put Russia in its place and start by depriving it of its veto right, at least when it comes to issues related to the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine. What else could we do to bring peace to Ukraine and find a long-lasting solution to Russian aggression?

Back in March 2015, I requested the Security Council to deploy a peacekeeping operation in the territory of Ukraine under the mandate of the Security Council. That initiative was blocked by the Russian Federation, which rejected the possibility of full-fledged United Nations involvement to resolve the conflict. The Russian Federation distorted the very idea and objectives of a peacekeeping operation in Ukraine.

However, I am still a strong believer that a United Nations-mandated multinational peacekeeping operation, with a clear objective to end Russian aggression and restore Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, could be a decisive factor in bringing peace to Donbas. We stand ready to engage in a constructive discussion on that initiative. A technical assessment mission, which the Secretary-General could send to Donbas in order to elaborate the respective options available, would definitely assist such a discussion.

For Ukraine it is a matter of principle that any decision on establishing a peacekeeping operation in Donbas should extend its mandate over the entire occupied territory, including the border, and should provide for the withdrawal of Russian troops and their weaponry from our territory, as well as the dissolution of all illegal bodies and structures.

It is also important that any peacekeeping operation be based on the key United Nations peacekeeping principle — to be impartial, unbiased and neutral above all. I would like to assure the Assembly that such a mission would not contradict the Minsk agreements, as Russia tried to maintain. It would, instead, greatly assist in making Russia fulfil the Minsk agreements in good faith.

Ukraine has always demonstrated goodwill and taken real steps towards progress. What have we received in return? Nothing. The aggression continues because Russia is not interested in the settlement at all. It does not care about Donbas or Crimea. It needs all of Ukraine to restore the second edition of the Soviet Union. The Ukrainian people are not going to give up on their hard-won independence and bend their knee to the aggressor. That will never happen.

The Russian aggression will be over once the Kremlin leadership decides to stop it, withdraw its troops from Ukraine's territory and return the control of the Ukraine-Russia State border where it belongs. I would like to remind everyone that when the Assembly calls on Russia to stop fighting, it calls for ending the war. And when it calls on Ukraine to stop fighting in defending itself, it calls on it to give up Ukrainian sovereignty.

Looking back over the past five years, I have to reconfirm that there is no alternative to a peaceful settlement of this international conflict. That is why I reaffirm, yet again, from this highest world rostrum, Ukraine's firm commitment to multilateralism and international law. The Kremlin's aggression towards us has had the entirely opposite effect from that intended. Instead of submitting to Russia, we have defied it. Instead of giving up our European dream, we have accelerated our path towards it. Instead of bowing our heads, we have raised them high and said to Mr. Putin that he will not break us.

I urge Russia, as a party to the conflict, to honour its own obligations under the Minsk agreements. I ask the Assembly to support us, stand with us and deny the Kremlin's imperial ambitions. Only together can we compel Russia — an occupying Power and aggressor — to accept its responsibility and cease its aggressive actions. We believe that the United Nations has an important role to play.

Limiting the United Nations engagement to humanitarian action or human rights monitoring in Ukraine is absolutely not enough. We felt hopeful when Secretary-General António Guterres listed the issue of resolving the Russian-Ukrainian conflict among his priorities in 2018. Regrettably, not much progress has been made, yet it has to be made. It must be made for Reshat Ametov, Volodymyr Rybak and Yury Popravko — and for the thousands upon thousands of other victims of this cruel, ugly and absolutely

unnecessary war, as well as for the civilians, the soldiers and the families, for those who never came back and those who spend sleepless nights crying for them, and for the world, peace and the honour of humankind.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of Ukraine for the statement he has just made.

*Mr. Petro Poroshenko, President of Ukraine, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.*

#### **Agenda item 67**

#### **The situation in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine**

**Ms. Juul** (Norway): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Nordic countries — Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden and my own country, Norway.

Five years have passed since the start of the Russian Federation's violation of international law in Ukraine. The violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity began with the illegal occupation and annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol, followed by the destabilization of eastern Ukraine, which led to the illegal declaration of independence of the so-called People's Republics.

Russia has extended its illegal annexation of Crimea by militarizing the peninsula, building the Kerch Strait Bridge and gradually imposing unilateral control over the Strait. Russia escalated tension on 25 November 2018 by using force against Ukrainian vessels. We call for the immediate release of the vessels and the 24 crew members who have been detained in Russia, as well as the permanent restoration of free access to Ukrainian ports on the Sea of Azov. We stress that those violations of international law, the Charter of the United Nations, the Helsinki Final Act and the Paris Charter are not a bilateral or European concern, but a global one. We therefore welcome this debate in the General Assembly.

We are concerned about the deterioration of the human rights situation in Crimea, including pressure on, detentions of, and dubious charges against, human rights defenders, journalists and minorities, in particular Crimean Tatars. We call for the release of all political prisoners held in Crimea and Russia. We further urge all parties to uphold their human rights commitments and grant international monitoring bodies full access to all parts of Ukraine's internationally recognized territory, in line with the relevant General Assembly resolutions.

The conflict in eastern Ukraine has resulted in the deaths of an estimated 13,000 people and the displacement of millions. Regrettably, the implementation of the Minsk agreements is not moving forward. The ceasefire to which the parties committed has been respected for only a few days since the agreements were signed in 2014 and 2015. The holding of elections in the so-called People's Republics last November constituted a further breach of the Minsk agreements. We call on Russia to stop fuelling the conflict by providing financial and military support to the armed formations and to withdraw its military equipment and personnel from non-Government-controlled areas. Once again, we urge all parties to fulfil their commitments.

The humanitarian situation is dire owing to shelling, mining, disrupted utilities and lamentable conditions at crossing points on the contact line. We remind the parties of their responsibilities concerning the protection of the civilian population. We also urge them to allow unhindered access for humanitarian actors in line with international humanitarian law. The protracted conflict has exacerbated the humanitarian needs of the population. We call on donors to contribute to the underfunded humanitarian response plan. Furthermore, all Ukrainian citizens, including those living in non-Government-controlled areas, and internally displaced persons should receive social benefits and pensions, to which they are eligible regardless of their place of residence.

The Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe is carrying out valuable work with regard to both reporting and overseeing limited ceasefires, which allow utilities to be repaired. However, the SMM's monitors frequently face restrictions, threats and intimidation, predominantly in non-Government-controlled areas. Along with attacks against SMM equipment, that is unacceptable. We urge all parties to ensure the security of the SMM and its ability to fulfil its mandate, which covers all of Ukraine's territory, including the Crimean peninsula.

*Mr. Arrocha Ruíz (Panama), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

The Nordic countries are convinced that the rules-based world order is essential for our common security. We call on members of the international community to adopt non-recognition policies in line with resolution 68/262. We urge the Russian Federation to abide by

international law and end its ongoing violations of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. We further call on the Secretary-General and the whole United Nations to assess what more can be done to restore security and respect for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the observer of the European Union

**Mr. Vale de Almeida** (European Union): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its 28 member States. The candidate countries the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania, as well as the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

The European Union recalls its unwavering support for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. In line with resolution 68/262, the European Union does not recognize and continues to condemn the illegal annexation of the Crimean peninsula by Russia, which remains a clear violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity and a direct challenge to international security with grave implications for the international legal order that protects the unity and sovereignty of all States. We reconfirm our condemnation of that violation of international law and remain committed to fully implementing our non-recognition policy, including through restrictive measures. We call again on States Members of the United Nations to consider similar non-recognition measures in line with resolution 68/262.

The European Union expresses its concern about the ongoing militarization of the Crimean peninsula, the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. Since the illegal annexation by the Russian Federation, the human rights situation in the Crimean peninsula has severely deteriorated. Residents of the peninsula face systematic restrictions of fundamental freedoms, such as the freedoms of expression, religion or belief and association and the right to peaceful assembly. The rights of the Crimean Tatars have been gravely violated through the shutting down of Crimean Tatar media outlets, the banning of the activities of the Mejlis, their self-governing body, and the persecution of its leaders and members of their community. Further violating international humanitarian law, hundreds of men from the Crimean peninsula have been conscripted

into the Russian Armed Forces. Crimean Tatars, Ukrainians and all ethnic and religious communities in the peninsula must be ensured the possibility of maintaining and developing their culture, traditions, education and identity.

The European Union calls for full compliance with international human rights standards in the peninsula. All pending cases of human rights violations and abuses, such as enforced disappearances, torture and killings, should be thoroughly investigated. The European Union calls for the release of the approximately 70 political prisoners being held in the Crimean peninsula and Russia, in particular Pavlo Hryb and Edem Bekirov, who both require urgent medical assistance. The European Union fully supports the work and reports of the human rights monitoring mission in Ukraine of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and stresses that all international human rights observers and monitoring mechanisms should be granted full, free and unrestricted access to the entire sovereign territory of Ukraine, including in particular the Crimean peninsula, as laid out in resolutions 71/205, 72/190 and 73/263, on the situation of human rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine.

The European Union calls for the full implementation of those resolutions, including the Russian Federation's obligations under applicable international humanitarian law. The EU further calls for full and immediate compliance with the order of the International Court of Justice of 19 April 2017 in the case concerning the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

The situation in the Sea of Azov remains high on our agenda. The EU expressed its utmost concern about the dangerous increase in tensions in the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait and Russia's violations of international law, which have led to the seizure of Ukrainian vessels and their crews by Russia and shots being fired at them, wounding several Ukrainian servicemen. There is no justification for the use of military force by Russia. Russia's aggressive actions also affect the security situation in the entire Black Sea region. The European Union requests the immediate and unconditional release of all detained Ukrainian servicemen, as well as the return of the seized vessels. The EU also expects Russia to ensure unhindered and free passage through the Kerch Strait to and from the Sea of Azov, in accordance with international law. We

will continue to follow the situation closely, and we are determined to act appropriately, in close coordination with our international partners. Preparatory work is ongoing to strengthen our support in favour of the affected areas of Ukraine.

The EU remains firm in its call on all sides to swiftly and fully implement the Minsk agreements and honour their commitments in full in order to achieve a sustainable political solution to the conflict in line with the principles and commitments of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). We call on Russia to fully assume its responsibility in that regard and use its considerable influence over the armed formations it backs to meet the Minsk commitments in full. Respect for those principles and commitments must be restored.

The European Union fully supports the efforts of the Normandy format, the OSCE and the Trilateral Contact Group. A sustainable ceasefire is urgently needed. Regrettably, the security situation remains highly volatile; a genuine ceasefire has not yet been reached. The sides should withdraw heavy weapons, disengage and undertake comprehensive demining. In violation of their commitments, the sides continue to shoot and strengthen their military positions along the line of contact inside the disengagement areas, which we condemn.

We call on Russia to immediately stop fuelling the conflict by providing financial and military support to the armed formations. We remain deeply concerned over information about the presence of Russian military equipment and personnel in areas currently not under the control of the Government of Ukraine. The European Union condemns the continuous deterioration of the human rights situation in the non-Government-controlled areas, including in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

The duration of the European Union's economic sanctions against Russia is linked to the complete implementation of the Minsk agreements.

We strongly condemn the continued threats and restrictions to the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM), which occur predominantly in areas currently not under the control of the Government of Ukraine. That hampers the fulfilment of the SMM's mandate. The SMM must have safe, secure, unconditional and unimpeded access throughout Ukraine. That includes the Crimean peninsula and the coastal line east of

Mariupol and along the Ukraine-Russia State border, to which the SMM is systematically denied access. We express our concern that the ability to target SMM assets without serious consequences contributes to creating an atmosphere of impunity, which negatively impacts the Special Monitoring Mission's effectiveness and the safety and security of its staff and assets. Those responsible for any wilful damage, destruction or loss of SMM unmanned aerial vehicles and other assets should be held accountable.

Civilians are the ones paying the price when the sides do not adhere to the ceasefire, when they do not withdraw heavy weapons and when they do not remove mines, but instead are laying new ones. It is of deep concern that the freedom of movement of civilians remains severely restricted throughout eastern Ukraine, with only five entry-exit checkpoints open. Civilians suffer in harsh weather conditions waiting for hours to cross at those points in order to meet their basic human needs, such as seeing family members and collecting medicine and food. At times, people die while waiting. Humanitarian assistance to all people in need is paramount, and we call on the sides to guarantee unhindered and sustained access for humanitarian actors.

After five years of conflict, the deteriorating security situation in eastern Ukraine has an increasing impact on the civilian population, in particular the most vulnerable living in the non-Government-controlled areas and along both sides of the contact line, where people are under continuous threat of shelling. We share a profound concern for their suffering. Humanitarian needs in those areas have increased as a result of the prolonged conflict. Adequate social benefits and pensions to all internally displaced persons should be provided, regardless of their place of residence and in accordance with the Ukrainian Constitution. Protecting the supply of water, energy and other utilities across the line of contact and mitigating environmental risks are key to avoiding a worsening of the situation.

In conclusion, let me recall a few statistics. The United Nations believes that 5.2 million Ukrainians continue to be exposed to the consequences of this protracted crisis, directly or indirectly. The United Nations multi-year 2019-2020 humanitarian response plan appeals for donor funding. According to the response plan, \$162 million is needed in 2019 to reach the 2.3 million most vulnerable men, women and children with humanitarian assistance and

protection in Ukraine. We recall that the 2018 response plan — which called for \$187 million — was funded by only approximately 37 per cent. The decreasing level of humanitarian funding is rapidly reducing the ability to deliver humanitarian assistance. Together with the restrictions on access for humanitarian assistance to the affected regions, that could result in eroding the standard of living of the most affected people and create new humanitarian needs.

The European Union, together with its 28 member States, is the largest donor of humanitarian and early recovery/development assistance to Ukraine, having provided over €681 million since the beginning of the conflict, approximately half for humanitarian aid. Today we confirm our pledge to do our utmost in that area to decrease the suffering of the Ukrainian population.

**Mr. Cichocki** (Poland): First and foremost, allow me to say that Poland proudly aligns itself with the statement just delivered by the observer of the European Union.

Exactly five years ago, on 20 February 2014, several dozen protesters were shot dead in the streets of Kyiv, marking the bloodiest day of Ukraine's revolution of dignity. This anniversary also marks the flagrant violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity through acts of aggression by the Russian Federation, starting with the illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, which we have not and will not recognize. Russia's openly aggressive behaviour is continuing, having already claimed well over 10,000 lives and led to the forced displacement of 1.6 million people from Donbas. According to United Nations statistics, 5.2 million Ukrainians are directly or indirectly affected by the conflict.

With regard to Ukraine, we have witnessed far too many instances of Russia's regrettable disregard for the core principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. The situation in eastern Ukraine remains highly volatile and still poses a threat to international peace and security. Despite the most recent renewed commitment to the cessation of hostilities on the eve of the winter holidays, the ceasefire violations have reverted to previous levels. Those developments demonstrate Russia's unchanged intention to use military force to achieve its political goals. What is more, Russia took no steps to ease tensions after the so-called elections in the Russian-controlled parts

of Donbas, which constituted a gross violation of the Minsk agreements. As a result, the security situation in the region has been deteriorating constantly.

The continuous militarization of the Sea of Azov exemplifies unacceptable behaviour challenging the international order. In that regard, let me recall that in November Russia resorted to an unjustifiable use of military force against Ukrainian vessels, held naval personnel captive and seized virtually unilateral control over the Kerch Strait, in flagrant violation of Russia's international obligations. Russia has ignored international calls to release 24 Ukrainian prisoners of war ever since. With respect to the Kerch Strait, I must reiterate that the illegal construction of the Kerch Bridge, accompanied by Russia impeding the passage of ships, including those heading to and from Ukrainian ports on the Sea of Azov, has already caused major socioeconomic damage to the area.

Let me also briefly touch upon the humanitarian and human rights situation in Ukraine. The already huge humanitarian crisis is being aggravated by severe winter conditions, the growing presence of mines and unexploded ordnance and the harsh restrictions affecting the freedom of movement of civilians who wait for hours in long queues at the checkpoints along the contact line to meet their basic needs, such as seeing family members or getting medicine and food. Meanwhile, Russia-backed militants continue to block access to the area for international humanitarian organizations and refuse to make basic improvements to the crossing facilities under their control. As a result, there has been a threefold increase in civilian deaths by natural causes at checkpoints as compared to last year, as reported by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM).

We remain highly concerned about the systematic violations of the human rights in illegally annexed Crimea, including unjustified restrictions on the freedoms of opinion, expression and movement and on property rights. We are also alarmed by the occupying Russian administration's repressive policy towards indigenous Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians. Furthermore, we cannot turn a blind eye to the numerous arbitrary detentions, preventive arrests and other forms of violations against detained persons in the Russian-controlled Ukrainian territories. In that context, it is worth recalling that in 2018 the Polish Minister for Foreign Affairs honoured Mr. Oleg Sentsov, a Ukrainian

film director who had been on a dramatic 145-day hunger strike to protest the incarceration of Ukrainian political prisoners in Russia and illegally annexed Crimea, with the Pro Dignitate Humana Award. I take this opportunity to once again urge the authorities of the Russian Federation to release Mr. Sentsov and other Ukrainian citizens imprisoned for political reasons.

Let me also stress on this occasion that the international presence on the ground, whether it be in the form of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission or the United Nations human rights monitoring mission in Ukraine, continues to experience significant restrictions on the freedom of movement across all Ukraine. That serves to confirm Moscow's disregard for the SMM's mandate as well as the safety and security of unarmed civilian monitors.

Given the stalemate in the political negotiations and the prolonged suffering of Ukrainians, we ask ourselves what we can do to end this conflict. I would argue for a two-pronged approach. First, and most important, Russia must conform to the Minsk agreements and, accordingly, withdraw its formations and weapon systems from sovereign Ukrainian territory. Secondly, at the same time, the United Nations should not cease to look for fresh ideas that could break the political deadlock and open up new opportunities for immediate improvement of the situation on the ground. One such idea is the deployment of a fully fledged United Nations-mandated peacekeeping mission to Ukraine. We understand that there are diverging views as to the parameters of such a mission, but the United Nations could at least initiate the process by sending a fact-finding mission to Ukraine. As an elected member of the Security Council, Poland is ready to facilitate that endeavour.

Let me conclude by reiterating that the death toll of the revolution of dignity five years ago exceeded a 100 Euromaidan protesters, which was the sacrifice that the people of Ukraine made for the sake of modernization, a decent life and pro-democratic aspirations. I can assure everyone that Poland will continue to support our neighbour to make those aspirations a reality.

**Mr. Uibo** (Estonia): First of all, Estonia aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union. I would now like to make some additional remarks in my national capacity.

Today, on the fifth anniversary of the Russian military aggression against Ukraine, Estonia renews its

strong support for Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders and territorial waters. The Autonomous Republic of Crimea, the city of Sevastopol and certain territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions are, and will remain, parts of Ukraine. We urge the Russian Federation to stop its aggression and illegal occupation of Ukraine's territory without delay.

Respect for territorial integrity and the prohibition of the use of force are fundamental principles of international law. Those two principles are clearly stated in the Charter of the United Nations and in the Helsinki Final Act. It was agreed that no country can change another country's borders by force. By forcibly separating territory belonging to Ukraine, invading it and prohibiting Ukraine from exercising its sovereignty within its own borders, Russia has been in violation of international law. Such actions not only seriously infringe upon Ukraine's right to freely choose its path but also pose a threat to the international community as a whole by risking sending us back to a world of disorder. The international community must stand up to these illegal and aggressive actions and maintain pressure until Russia respects international law and Ukraine's sovereignty.

Estonia will never recognize the illegal annexation of the Crimean peninsula by the Russian Federation. Estonia remains committed to fully implementing its non-recognition policy and supporting the application of restrictive measures and sanctions against Russia until the Minsk agreements are fully implemented and Ukraine's territorial integrity is restored.

We are deeply concerned that last year Russia's ongoing disregard for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity was extended to the Sea of Azov. Estonia strongly condemns Russia's unjustified use of military force and the illegal seizure of Ukrainian navy vessels and their crew members, which took place in international waters. The Ukrainian servicemen should be immediately released and the freedom of navigation in the Kerch Strait and the Sea of Azov should be restored, in accordance with international law, specifically the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Moreover, we are worried about Russia's continuous steps towards the militarization of the Crimean peninsula, including its industry and transportation. Large-scale military exercises in the Black Sea and a growing arsenal of weaponry are very worrisome developments that are to be condemned.

We are also greatly concerned about the systematic human rights violations perpetrated by the Russian Federation in illegally annexed Crimea. We urgently call for putting an end to the persecution of individuals, including Crimean Tatars, pro-Ukrainian activists and journalists who are critical of Russian authorities, and for the immediate release of all political prisoners illegally detained by them. Estonia condemns all attempts by the Russian Federation to legitimize or normalize its illegal annexation of Crimea, including the automatic imposition of Russian Federation citizenship and illegal election campaigns.

We also remain deeply concerned about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in eastern Ukraine and the plight of the Ukrainian people. There are 3.4 million Ukrainians who still need humanitarian assistance. Estonia has actively provided humanitarian assistance to Ukraine. In addition, we have decided to contribute to the newly established Ukraine country-based pooled fund, which makes it possible to more efficiently and flexibly meet the humanitarian needs of the Ukrainian people.

Five years have passed, and the ongoing military conflict in eastern Ukraine has shown no signs of abating. Thirteen thousand people have been killed, with new casualties every day. Estonia remains steadfast in its support for the people of Ukraine. Russia should start fulfilling its Minsk commitments, stop hostilities and withdraw its armed formations and military equipment from eastern Ukraine, as well as ensure safe and unfettered access for established international human rights monitoring mechanisms to Crimea, the city of Sevastopol and the entire Donbas territory.

**Mr. Duclos** (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful for the convening of this meeting, which reminds us that international relations must be based on respect for international law and international agreements. My country renews its commitment to respecting the territorial integrity of States and to the prohibition of the use or threat of use of force. We wish to reiterate in particular our commitment to the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine, in line with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and resolution 68/262. In that regard, we also stress the importance of implementing the Memorandum on Security Assurances in Connection with Ukraine's Accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, signed on 5 December 1994, which gave

assurances with regard to Ukraine's territorial integrity in the process of Ukraine's accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

Against that backdrop, we wish to reiterate our concern about the conflict in eastern Ukraine and its serious implications for the country's governance and development, as well as the devastating impact on its civilian population, particularly women, children and the elderly.

Peru considers the Minsk agreements to be the legal basis for reaching a political solution and ending the conflict. We reiterate our support for the set of measures endorsed by the Security Council more than three years ago calling for their full implementation. We also welcome the efforts of the Normandy format countries and the Trilateral Contact Group to facilitate dialogue between the parties and contribute to restoring peace in Ukraine and achieving regional stability.

We therefore consider it essential to comply with the ceasefire agreed by the parties, as well as with the withdrawal of heavy artillery located near populated areas. Despite the ceasefire agreements, in the course of five years of conflict more than 3,300 civilians have lost their lives and more than 9,000 people have been injured. It is alarming that last month alone the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe recorded more than 16,000 ceasefire violations, many with weapons that should have been removed and outlawed by international law, such as anti-personnel mines.

We also reiterate the need to ensure that humanitarian assistance is carried out without hindrance and under international supervision. More than 4.3 million people are in dire need of humanitarian assistance. In that regard, Peru commends the work of the international community in general, and of the United Nations in particular, in supporting the efforts of the Ukrainian authorities to alleviate the suffering of the civilians affected by the conflict, particularly those living on either side of the line of contact.

Finally, while reiterating the importance of the implementation of existing international commitments, we also stress the need to restore the Ukrainian Government's control over its entire territory, and thereby restore the essential social and economic ties that will ensure the welfare of its people.

**Ms. Plepytė** (Lithuania): First of all, I welcome the presence of President Poroshenko at this debate.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier on behalf of the European Union. We would now like to highlight the following points in our national capacity.

It is symbolic that we are holding this important General Assembly meeting on the situation in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine on the day when we commemorate the fifth anniversary of the powerful but tragic events in the Maidan. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the heroism and devotion of Ukrainians in defence of their freedom and democracy.

On this very day five years ago, so-called green men appeared in Crimea, which led to the occupation and annexation of the peninsula and attempts to do the same subsequently in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Regretfully, five years on, the situation in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine remains dire and the deadliest conflict on European soil of recent times is still ongoing.

Respect for international law by all countries is vital to maintaining international peace and security. Unfortunately, the past five years of conflict in Ukraine represent a history of stark neglect and violation of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. The annexation of Crimea undermines the very basis of the international legal order and threatens international peace and security as a whole. Let me be clear: the role of Russia and its continuous violations of the stability and territorial integrity of Ukraine cannot be underestimated. The conflict in Ukraine was initiated — and is now being orchestrated, financed and supported — by Moscow. Russia therefore holds the key to resolving the situation in Ukraine.

Let me now turn to some steps that are crucial for the situation in Ukraine to be resolved. The full and swift implementation of the Minsk agreements by all parties is a central precondition to achieving a lasting solution to this deadly conflict. In that regard, we especially call on Russia to stop providing its financial and military support to the separatist regions of Luhansk and Donetsk and to exercise its influence and power to ensure that those regions meet the Minsk commitments in full.

We fully back the activities of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. At the same time, we regret to witness that it is increasingly facing threats and is denied access to some areas in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. We therefore call on all sides to ensure the unconditional and safe access of international observers from the OSCE Mission to all areas inscribed in the mandate of the Mission.

We strongly condemn the recent increase in tension in the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait and the violation of international law by Russia. We request the immediate release of the Ukrainian service members and the return of illegally seized vessels. In that regard, we also call for an immediate release of the approximately 70 political prisoners being held on the Crimean peninsula and in Russia, in particular Pavlo Hryb and Edem Bekirov, both of whom require urgent medical assistance.

Various reports provide evidence of an intense and systematically repressive policy on the Crimean peninsula against human right defenders, journalists and civil society. The judicial system is used for politically motivated prosecution of opponents in Crimea, especially targeting Crimean Tatars. Full compliance with international human rights standards on the peninsula is of paramount importance.

Lithuania, along with other European countries, continuously provides humanitarian assistance to Ukraine. We urge the international community to also contribute to easing the suffering of civilians. The conflict in eastern Ukraine has caused a humanitarian crisis that directly affects over 5 million people on both sides of the contact line, the majority of them elderly people. The civilian population faces increasing threats from mines and unexploded remnants of war. The security of humanitarian personnel, their full access to those in need and the proper functioning of critical civilian infrastructure are crucial.

In conclusion, let me once again reiterate Lithuania's full support for the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. We also call on the international community and States Members of the United Nations to continue to stand with Ukraine by supporting its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

**Mr. Mlynár (Slovakia):** We thank the President for convening this debate on the situation in the temporarily occupied territories in Ukraine.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement made earlier by the observer of the European Union. I shall limit my statement to some additional remarks in my national capacity.

Slovakia reiterates its support for the independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders, reiterates Ukraine's sovereignty over the Crimean peninsula and its part of the Sea of Azov and recognizes Ukraine's absolute right to full access to the Sea of Azov, as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Slovakia supported the adoption of resolution 73/194 last December. We have serious concerns about the continued lack of progress towards achieving a permanent ceasefire and ending hostilities in eastern Ukraine. Similarly, we express our very serious concern about the volatile security situation in parts of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, which must not be allowed to escalate into open conflict.

A few days ago we marked the fourth anniversary of the signing of the Minsk agreements — the road map for a peaceful solution to the Donbas crisis. There has been no progress in fulfilling the terms of those agreements in the past four years. Neither side — for a long time now — has shown real interest in resolving the crisis. We take this opportunity to urge both sides to actively fulfil their obligations under the Minsk agreements and thereby contribute to a peaceful solution.

The key confidence-building measures — a ceasefire, weapons withdrawal and disengagement — have already been agreed, but stronger political will is required for their implementation. Additional measures to strengthen the ceasefire, as already proposed by the parties involved, would serve to build confidence further.

As the Assembly is aware, Slovakia chairs the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) this year. Preventing, mediating and mitigating conflict and focusing on the people it affects is one of our three main priorities, together with providing for a safer future and effective multilateralism. As the crisis in and around Ukraine is one of the most critical issues for the common security of the OSCE region, the Slovak chairmanship is making every effort to achieve its peaceful resolution. In line with OSCE principles

and commitments, Slovakia is actively engaged in reducing tension, building trust and facilitating dialogue between the sides. In that regard, the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Miroslav Lajčák, Minister for Foreign and European Affairs of Slovakia, paid his first visit to Ukraine in his new capacity in mid-January. That visit was followed by a trip to Moscow, which took place just yesterday.

It is our intention, during the OSCE chairmanship, to work towards much-needed improvements in the living conditions of the conflict-affected population. In that respect, based on what was observed and discussed with the relevant interlocutors during his visits, the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office aims to identify possible areas by which small, concrete steps could be undertaken to alleviate the suffering of civilians.

We continue to stress that the resolution of the current crisis in Ukraine can be achieved only through a lasting peaceful settlement. The package of measures for the implementation of the Minsk agreements, which was endorsed by Security Council resolution 2202 (2015), of 17 February 2015, marked its fourth anniversary on 12 February this year. We strongly support the Minsk process and underline the need for full compliance with resolution 2202 (2015).

After almost five years since the beginning of the crisis, we believe that the only way to achieve a peaceful resolution is through the full and comprehensive implementation of the Minsk agreements by all parties to the conflict. In that regard, we reiterate our full support for the Normandy format, the Trilateral Contact Group and the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine and its monitors, which includes 12 Slovaks who are performing with bravery in a challenging environment.

The civilian population of Ukraine continues to face serious humanitarian challenges. According to the United Nations, 3.5 million people in Ukraine need humanitarian assistance, while about 1.5 million are internally displaced. Those who remain in the conflict-affected territories face a daily struggle to survive. There is an urgent need to scale up efforts to alleviate the suffering of civilians caught in the middle of the conflict. Specific measures to improve the living conditions of the civilian population on both sides of the contact line in Donbas should be put in place. Slovakia will continue to take practical steps to address humanitarian needs and support vulnerable population groups and recovery efforts in eastern

Ukraine. Last month, for example, we donated 24 tons of humanitarian aid to the Luhansk regional children's hospital in Lysychansk.

In conclusion, we would like to once again affirm Slovakia's full commitment to preventing further escalation in the region and helping to improve the dire humanitarian situation.

**Mrs. Zappia (Italy):** Italy fully subscribes to the statement delivered earlier by the observer of the European Union.

Italy reiterates its unwavering support for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence of Ukraine within its internationally recognized legal borders. We remain deeply concerned about the crisis in and around Ukraine and its impact on stability and cooperation in Europe. As Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 2018, Italy spared no effort in restoring mutual trust and facilitating dialogue towards a lasting and sustainable solution, and gave top priority to alleviating the civilian population's humanitarian situation, working relentlessly to strengthen the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. We tried to take maximum advantage of the unique platform for dialogue that the OSCE provides, among other things convening two special meetings of the OSCE Permanent Council to discuss the evolution of the crisis and holding a special Political Directors' meeting on the margins of the Ministerial Council in Milan in December to explore possibilities for the creation of a full-fledged United Nations peacekeeping mission, in close coordination with the OSCE.

In line with resolution 68/262, we condemn and do not recognize the illegal annexation of the Crimean peninsula, and we reiterate our great concern for the ongoing militarization of the peninsula and the Sea of Azov. We urge full respect for international humanitarian and human rights law in the Crimean peninsula, in line with resolutions 71/205, 72/190 and 73/263, which Italy supported and sponsored. Human rights observers and humanitarian actors should be granted full and unhindered access.

Italy remains strongly committed to a sustainable political solution based on the Minsk agreements, and affirms its strong support for diplomatic efforts through the Normandy format, the OSCE and the Trilateral Contact Group. We urge all sides to show the genuine commitment and political will needed to enable the

negotiations in those formats to regain momentum. There is no alternative to the Minsk agreements. We call on all sides to implement them swiftly and fully, and we condemn all initiatives that run counter to their letter and spirit. We call on Russia to assume its full responsibility in that regard. We call on all sides to work in good faith to respect all their commitments, starting with the establishment of a full and comprehensive ceasefire, the withdrawal of all heavy weapons and the disengagement process. The role of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission is essential. Our support for the Monitoring Mission and its observers will not waver. It must be granted safe, secure, unhindered and unconditional access throughout Ukraine in accordance with its mandate.

The civilian population is bearing the heaviest burden of all. The death toll from five years of conflict and the continued threat represented by shelling and mines remind us that despite all our joint efforts, peace in Europe is not yet a reality. It is imperative to stop the violence, get to work immediately on fulfilling all mine-action commitments and ensure full and unimpeded access for all humanitarian actors. The vulnerability of the population, especially the elderly, and the lives lost at crossing points are unacceptable. Urgent steps must be taken to ensure that civilians can cross the contact line safely by ensuring that existing crossing points are secure and accessible and by opening new ones. Priority must be given to providing basic services, ensuring that critical civilian infrastructure is repaired, protected and continues to function, and providing all internally displaced people with access to social benefits and pensions, as laid down in the Ukrainian Constitution.

Dialogue may not be the easiest choice, but it is the only choice. Confrontation is not a solution. It is not sustainable for the security of the region and it is certainly not sustainable for the people. Italy will continue to support intensified diplomatic and humanitarian efforts for a peaceful solution at the bilateral level, within the European Union and in the relevant multilateral forums.

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would like to begin by stating that the proposed, or rather imposed, title for this meeting is deliberately misleading. If anyone is occupying Ukrainian territory today, it is the Maidan authorities under the control of external forces.

As for Crimea, I am not even going to talk about it today. Crimea is part of Russia. The Crimeans themselves have closed that case once and for all. The Ukrainian authorities and President Poroshenko long ago made the slogan of Russia's aggression, annexation and occupation their personal political credo. They use it to scare the world and incite hatred of Russia and everything Russian in their own country and do not shrink from offensive insults aimed at Russia's leaders and people. That has become the signature style, if you will, of the Ukrainian authorities and President Poroshenko personally. It is a pity that the Assembly cannot hear and understand it in the original, because a great deal is lost in translation. Through a style of communication based on street talk, the Ukrainian leadership is clearly attempting to show the world the civilized Europeanness about which it brags so much as well as how it distinguishes itself from uncultured Muscovites.

President Poroshenko, who was elected in 2014, declared himself the President of peace and promised to end the war in Donbas immediately. But no sooner had the world community got used to that pronouncement than President Poroshenko was transformed into the President of war, a war that continues to this day. We are sorry to have to say that wherever President Poroshenko goes, we smell gunpowder, the gunpowder of a fratricidal war. Let me remind the Assembly that it was not Donbas that marched on Kyiv, it was the Ukrainian warriors, as President Poroshenko described them, who came to Donbas. It was their guns that fired on residential neighbourhoods in Donetsk and other cities, killing peaceful Ukrainian citizens.

Kyiv has found the slogan of Russian aggression very convenient for justifying both its action and its inaction. But here is the problem with that. On 12 February, we decided to ask Ambassador Apakan, Head of the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), a direct question about it, and he was obliged to admit that there were no regular Russian troops in Donbas. Clearly President Poroshenko had not been briefed about the outcome of the Security Council meeting on 12 February (see S/PV.8461), on the fourth anniversary of the Minsk agreements. In that context, his words — “truly twisted reality” — acquire a new and opposite meaning. Kyiv is replacing our understanding with the notion of Russian aggression, foisting it on those who have no real understanding of

these events, how they occurred or their particularities, as well as its cunning Western sponsors, who understand perfectly well.

It is very fashionable nowadays to assert that it is “highly likely” that Russia is to blame for everything, with no proof required. But now this concept and approach have actually become a part of President Poroshenko’s election campaign that has now reached all the way here, inside the General Assembly. The fact is that the real obstacle to peace in Ukraine is the Kyiv authorities’ proliferating lies and blatant unwillingness to implement the Minsk agreements or, to put it more precisely, Kyiv’s unwillingness to hold a dialogue with its own people. But why did these people rebel? In order to understand that, particularly considering the lies and propaganda originating in Kyiv and circulating in the West, we have to go back to the beginning, to where the Ukrainian crisis really began. Allow me to remind the Assembly of the sequence of events of five years ago.

In October 2013, President Viktor Yanukovich, having carefully scrutinized the text of the association agreement between Ukraine and the European Union (EU), asked for additional time in order to make a final decision about the wisdom of signing it. Nevertheless, on 13 November, the Ukrainian opposition announced that there would be mass protests if the country’s leadership of the country did not sign the EU association agreement. On 21 November mass protests began in the centre of Kyiv. On 30 November, militants from the Right Sector nationalist group, an organization that was later banned in Russia, took part in clashes with the police. On 1 December, so-called peaceful demonstrators began attacking Government buildings, and European diplomats — Jacek Protasiewicz, VicePresident of the European Parliament, Jerzy Buzek, a former President of the European Parliament, and Jarosław Kaczyński, former head of the Polish Government and leader of the Law and Justice party — all sided with the demonstrators.

On 9 December, Catherine Ashton, then High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and then United States Deputy Secretary of State Victoria Nuland both arrived in Kyiv. The next morning Ms. Nuland visited the Maidan, where she distributed bread and cookies. Later, during the international conference on Ukraine, she did not hide the fact that since the first moment of Ukraine’s independence, the United States had been supporting what it called the development in Ukraine

of democratic, civil-society and State governance institutions, as well as other goals, to the tune of \$5 billion. On 25 January 2014, talks began between President Yanukovich and the opposition.

On 19 and 20 February, large-scale violent clashes began in Kyiv in which many were killed and injured, including at the hands of snipers whose identity is still unknown to this day. A day earlier, however, the nationalists had already seized arms caches and army units. Those who died at the snipers’ hands were called the heavenly hundred and became symbols of the victims of the Yanukovich regime. Today, however, there is enough evidence to show that they were the victims of the horrifying incitements by the Maidan supporters, who needed some ritual bloodshed in order to fuel popular anger and attract supporters. On 21 February, Yanukovich and the opposition leaders signed the

in the presence of the so-called guarantors, the Foreign Ministers of Germany, Poland and France.

The very next day, however, the leaders of the radical opposition, including the Right Sector, refused to recognize the agreement and renewed their attacks on Government buildings, in violation of paragraph 5 of the Agreement. With his own life threatened, Yanukovich was forced to leave Kyiv because in the circumstances there was no hope of ensuring the promised guarantees for his personal safety. For ordinary Ukrainians, what resulted from the Maidan, now known in Ukraine as the revolution of dignity, was completely unexpected, and the people did not immediately realize that a genuine coup d’état had taken place right in front of their eyes.

Let us now look at these events through the eyes of the Russian-speaking people who make up at least 40 per cent of the population of Ukraine. What were they hearing as they tried to find their way in the rapidly changing political situation? Just one day after the coup, the new authorities repealed Ukraine’s dual language law. Even before that, on 20 February, Maidan nationalists set fire to a bus taking activists from Odessa to Kyiv in support of the legitimate authorities. On 25 February, Right Sector nationalists promised to suppress any displays of separatism, sending out a so-called friendship train with the slogan “Crimea will be Ukrainian or devoid of people”. And those are just a few episodes.

Residents of Odessa, Donetsk, Luhansk, Kharkiv and other cities began to think about how in these

circumstances they could ensure their own security and identity and their right to speak and be educated in their native language and to honour their history. With the example of the Kyiv Maidan before them, activists in the eastern regions began to seize administrative buildings. However, while the then Vice-President of the United States, Joseph Biden, had begged President Yanukovich not to use force against the civilian population under any circumstances, Oleksandr Turchynov, newly in power, immediately ordered people in the cities of Ukraine's south-east to cease their protests and threatened to use military force despite the fact that, unlike the Maidan protesters, those in the south-east were not crushing people under bulldozers or throwing bricks and Molotov cocktails at the police, as they had in Kyiv. Nevertheless, on 14 April 2014 a decree was signed beginning the so-called anti-terrorist operation. The usurpers of power in Kyiv immediately wrote off their own population as terrorists. And now even they are gone, too — all we have left are so-called Russian aggressors.

Who here today remembers what happened in the Odessa House of Trade Unions on 2 May 2014, when some 50 people were burned alive by nationalists simply because they did not agree with the ideals of the new authorities in Kyiv? That outrageous crime has not been investigated to this day. And on the very same day the siege of the city of Sloviansk began, about which Turchynov said that he would not rest until it was wiped off the face of the Earth. On 14 and 15 October neo-Nazis held torchlight processions accompanied by fascist symbols in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odessa and a number of other Ukrainian cities. And of course the meetings featured quotations from Hitler.

As early as 22 February, in an attempt to find a political way out of the situation, parliamentarians from Ukraine's south-eastern regions held a congress in Kharkiv whose main appeal was for preserving Ukraine's territorial integrity through federalization. However, in the wake of the events I have described, by then it was already clear to the people in south-eastern Ukraine that there was no way they could reach a peaceful agreement with the authorities now ruling in Kyiv. And that is what happened. Regular troops and punitive volunteer brigades of nationalists and radicals were sent to put down peaceful civilians. The civil war had begun.

The package of measures for implementing the Minsk agreements has existed since 12 February

2015. No one disputes the fact that this document is considered the basis for a settlement, just as no one can dispute the fact that there is no mention whatever of Russia in it. Today we circulated in a Security Council document information illustrating that and exposing the Ukrainian authorities' violations of the Minsk package, and we are ready to share it with anyone who would like to see it.

Kyiv has categorically refused to hold a direct dialogue with its own population in the south-east, instead spouting slogans about Russia's mythical occupation. The Ukrainian authorities, with Washington's backing, have shamelessly ignored and sabotaged the implementation of the Minsk package. The best illustration of this is the fact that on 5 February this year the Prosecutor General of Ukraine announced the start of criminal proceedings against Viktor Medvedchuk, one of the leaders of the Ukrainian opposition, who had presented his candidacy for the 31 March presidential elections. The reason given was Medvedchuk's call for the direct dialogue between Kyiv and Donbas that is a provision of the Minsk agreements, and for granting the region special status within Ukraine. In other words, the implementation of the Minsk agreements in Ukraine is now equivalent to treason and punished with criminal prosecution. I want to point out that Medvedchuk is also one of Kyiv's official representatives in the Minsk Contact Group, and he recently said:

“I am certain that under this Government it will probably be impossible to change anything regarding the implementation of the Minsk agreements. Any Government that wins the elections will have to deal with the main problem, which is establishing peace and ending the hostilities.”

Typically, President Poroshenko just now turned the situation relating to a possible United Nations peacekeeping operation in Donbas on its head. He forgot to mention that it was Russia that had submitted the relevant text of a draft resolution to the Security Council. However, it did not suit Ukraine and its Western sponsors because it corresponded precisely to the Minsk agreements, whereas Kyiv's goal is the exact opposite — sabotaging the Minsk process, which the President of Ukraine mentioned only once today and then through gritted teeth.

With respect to Donbas and, incidentally, to Crimea, a complete economic, transport and energy

blockade has been in effect for several years now. In the circumstances, the Russian Federation feels compelled to help the people of south-eastern Ukraine survive. That is why we are sending regular humanitarian convoys and have introduced the rouble there. Kyiv is not offering Donbas any other possibility for ensuring a normal life for its people. It will be otherwise for them, as President Poroshenko said on 14 November 2014:

“We will have work and they will not. We will have pensions and they will not. Our people, our children and pensioners, will be supported and they will not. Our children will go to school and kindergarten and theirs will be sitting in their cellars. And that is how we will win this war”.

I would like to ask the Europeans in this Hall today who promote the values of diversity if they think that it is normal to threaten to use military force against people with different political views and cultural customs. I hope that now that I have refreshed their memories of all this, they will finally come to realize that Kyiv is openly playing fast and loose with the facts in order to mislead them. These misapprehensions make it impossible to arrive at a truthful assessment of the Ukrainian conflict, and that mistake is being paid for in human lives. And until that is remedied and Kyiv is no longer allowed to persist with its sabotage, there will be no progress on a settlement.

To put it simply, the Kyiv authorities must start talking to their own people. As recently as the end of November, President Poroshenko's approval rating was at 5 per cent. However, thanks to a number of provocations, including in the Kerch Strait, a religious schism involving blatant Government interference in Church matters and a series of lying statements making crude and unfounded accusations against Russia, he has managed to get it up to 10 per cent. Today the General Assembly Hall has become nothing but a soapbox for his election campaign. We will see by how much today's meeting increases his approval rating, or does not. Incidentally, I want to point out that the Ukrainian authorities have not only forbidden Russian observers access to Ukraine's presidential elections, despite their OSCE obligations but also deprived the 3.5 million Ukrainians living in Russia of the opportunity to vote, just as they have the almost 4 million residents of Donbas. Whom do the members of the Assembly think those Ukrainian voters would vote — or, rather, not vote — for?

Ukraine is a classic example of outside interference and geopolitical engineering, a technique that the West has collectively made its own and is now applying in Venezuela. And it is doubly enjoyable for them in Ukraine because in the Ukrainian conflict the main target on this geopolitical chessboard is Russia. For us, the Ukrainian conflict is painful, while for Western strategists it is an unbounded joy, because in their world view, the worse it is for Russia, the better and happier it is for them. Ukraine is sinking ever deeper into the mire of political chaos, corruption, lawlessness and orgies of aggressive nationalism. The unprecedented situation is characterized by discrimination, linguistically, educationally and culturally, against the rights and freedoms of the Russian-speaking national minority in Ukraine. The legal nihilism and lawlessness that prevail in Ukraine are not being met with the appropriate response from the country's Western patrons, who are only inspiring the ruling regime to new anti-democratic steps and the destruction of moral standards and civilized behaviour.

And there we have it, ladies and gentlemen.

**Mrs. Molcean** (Republic of Moldova): Although the matter before us is an item on the General Assembly's agenda for the first time this year, it is not new to anyone who is aware of the events that have occurred in Ukraine since February 2014. According to our estimates, in the past five years, States Members of the United Nations have discussed the situation in Ukraine, including in the eastern part of the country, more than 30 times. The General Assembly has adopted five resolutions addressing various issues arising from the Russian Federation's illegal annexation of the Crimean peninsula. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Normandy format, the Trilateral Contact Group and other relevant formats and organizations have also been seized of these matters, which continue to affect the plight of the millions of Ukrainian citizens who have been exposed to the consequences of the unresolved crisis in Ukraine.

President Poroshenko's statement today and his update on the situation on the ground have deepened our concern about the erosion and destabilization of the situation in the already unstable region to which Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova both belong. The ongoing militarization of the Crimean peninsula, the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, the seizure of Ukrainian vessels and their crews, the presence of foreign military equipment and personnel in areas not currently under

the Government of Ukraine's control and the dire human rights situation in the Crimean peninsula and the Donetsk and Luhansk regions are matters of great concern to all of us.

The Republic of Moldova aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by the observer of the European Union and fully subscribes to its positions, including on the issues I have just mentioned.

The Republic of Moldova is also one of the many countries that supported the inclusion of this item in the agenda of the General Assembly at its current session under the title "The situation in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine". We have also supported the Assembly's adoption of all its resolutions on Ukraine and will continue to support Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty within its internationally recognized borders.

For the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine is more than just a friendly neighbouring country. We share many things, including a tragic past and similar current challenges to our territorial integrity and sovereignty. Like Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova is dealing with an externally generated conflict that prevents its Government from exercising effective control in the eastern part of the country. Militarization and the unlawful presence of unconstitutional power structures and foreign military forces and armaments in those areas are features that Ukraine and Moldova have in common. The holding of orchestrated illegal elections and referendums in the areas not under Government control and the mass issuance of foreign passports to their inhabitants, as well as the employment of sophisticated, subversive propaganda and disinformation policies, are only some of the instruments and hybrid tactics that are used to legitimize and obfuscate attempts aimed at changing internationally recognized borders.

By bringing matters arising from challenges to their sovereignty, territorial integrity and national security to the Assembly's attention, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and other States of the region are not seeking confrontation or trying to politicize the work of the General Assembly. It is only natural for such States to turn to the United Nations for assistance in promoting and encouraging solutions based on the strict observance of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. Our countries are deeply committed to the principles enshrined in the Charter and the 1970 Declaration on Principles of International

Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States. In that regard, I would like to recall a few of the principles that are solemnly proclaimed in the Declaration. The first is the principle that States shall refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State and from violating the existing international boundaries of another State as a means of solving international disputes, including territorial disputes and problems concerning States' borders. It also proclaims that every State has a duty to refrain from organizing or encouraging the organization of irregular forces or armed bands, including mercenaries, for incursion into the territory of another State. It also states that no territorial acquisition resulting from the threat or use of force shall be recognized as legal. For us, those principles are non-negotiable values.

The Russian Federation should therefore uphold fundamental principles that it has itself invoked many times and contribute, by acts and public statements, to stabilizing the situation in the areas of Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and elsewhere that are not controlled by their respective Governments, and to reversing the moves that contradict those principles. In that context, we call on the Russian Federation to put an end to its destabilizing interference in the region, to abide by the fundamental principles of international law and to fully implement the relevant General Assembly resolutions, particularly resolutions 68/262 and 72/282, entitled "Territorial integrity of Ukraine" and "Complete and unconditional withdrawal of foreign military forces from the territory of the Republic of Moldova", respectively.

It is difficult to imagine sustainable peace and security without the rule of law. At stake in our deliberations today is not only the situation in Ukraine but also stability and security in our region and the norms of international behaviour. The international community and the United Nations cannot pass over in silence acts that violate and undermine the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States. Doing so will only accelerate what is already a disturbing trend: that of making permanent situations imposed by force and other forms of coercion on the basis of *fait accompli*.

**Mr. Pildegovičs** (Latvia): I thank the President for convening today's debate under the new agenda item entitled "The situation in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine", which Latvia fully supported.

Latvia associates itself with the statement made earlier on behalf of the European Union and its member States.

Five years have passed since the Russian Federation illegally annexed Crimea. This gross violation of international law must not become a silent reality, and Russia's covert and overt actions in the east of Ukraine must not become business as usual. The international rules-based system was created with the aim of protecting every country's sovereignty and territorial integrity from attempts at illegal annexation or occupation by another country. The principles of the Charter of the United Nations apply to all Member States.

Latvia condemns the ongoing illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol. The international community clearly demonstrated its policy of non-recognition of the annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea by adopting resolution 68/262 in 2014. The United Nations and its specialized agencies have also maintained an unequivocal policy of non-recognition of the illegal annexation of Crimea.

We remain deeply concerned about the worsening social, economic and human rights situation on the ground. We appreciate the continued efforts of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) aimed at monitoring the human rights situation in Ukraine, including the situation in Crimea, despite access to the peninsula being denied. All OHCHR reports and numerous observations by other organizations emphasize the continuing deterioration of the human rights situation in Crimea. We are extremely concerned about the intimidation, incarceration and politically motivated persecution of the population, as well as restrictions of their basic rights and fundamental freedoms, with ethnic Ukrainians and minority groups being the most affected. Those Crimean people who are being affected by Russia's repressive policies have to be supported; they need to hear that the international community has not forgotten Crimea.

The most vulnerable and affected group in Crimea continues to be the Crimean Tatars, whose history is fraught with suffering and persecution. We are very alarmed by all the reports on torture, enforced disappearances and suspected killings, as well as continuous violations of the freedom of expression and opinion, the freedom of religion or belief and media freedom. Latvia strongly condemns discrimination

against Crimean Tatars. We will continue to raise this issue at the international level. We will also continue calling for providing full and unhindered access in Crimea to international monitors, including human rights observers.

We call on the authorities of the Russian Federation, as the occupying Power in Crimea, to end all human rights violations. All reported cases of persecution, arrests, ill treatment and torture should be thoroughly investigated. Latvia also calls on Russia to release all illegally detained Ukrainian political prisoners, including Ukrainian filmmaker Oleg Sentsov and journalist Roman Sushchenko.

Despite all the calls for Russia to abide by international agreements, principles and commitments, and despite the Minsk agreements and all the regional efforts, there has been no progress towards a resolution of the conflict in Ukraine. On the contrary, the security and humanitarian situation in eastern Ukraine has worsened as the ceasefire regime continues to be violated. The conflict has cost the lives of thousands and led to the suffering of millions of innocent people. Territories in the throes of conflict are inaccessible to international monitoring mechanisms. Illegal elections in the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics undermine international and Ukrainian law, as well as the Minsk agreements.

In the events that took place on 25 November 2018 in the Black Sea near the Kerch Strait, Russia once again cynically showed total disrespect for the norms of international law, by openly and directly attacking the Ukrainian navy with military force. Unfortunately, we do not see that as separate incident, but as a perpetuation of the continuous attacks on Ukraine's sovereignty. We call on Russia to release the detained Ukrainian servicemen and the seized navy vessels as soon as possible and unconditionally. We also emphasize the need to respect international and bilateral commitments and allow freedom of navigation in the Sea of Azov.

We must return to the rules-based security order in Europe. A peaceful resolution to the conflict in Ukraine that respects Ukraine's independence and territorial integrity must be a priority. Latvia strongly supports Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence. And we will support its chosen path of democratic reforms.

Latvia once again reiterates that the full implementation of the Minsk agreements by all parties

remains the benchmark for the achievement of peace in eastern Ukraine. More immediately, the daily violations of the ceasefire must come to an end. Russia must stop all forms of support to separatists and use its influence to make them adhere to the provisions of the Minsk agreements. We continue to support the diplomatic efforts within the Normandy format and the Trilateral Contact Group.

As regional organizations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the European Union have a natural role to play in resolving conflicts in Europe. We expect those organizations to actively engage, together with the United Nations, in the resolution of the conflict in Ukraine. Latvia will continue to strongly support the role of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in observing and assessing the progress in implementing the Minsk agreements. Monitors must be granted full, safe and unrestricted access to all conflict-affected areas, including the disengagement zones, heavy-armaments storage sites and the Russian-Ukrainian border. Any discussion on a possible United Nations peacekeeping mission in eastern Ukraine must fully involve the views of the Ukrainian side.

Latvia also appreciates the work of United Nations agencies and other humanitarian actors to respond to serious humanitarian challenges in eastern Ukraine. Latvia has contributed financially to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in order to provide assistance to Ukraine. We will also continue to provide bilateral humanitarian, medical and psychological assistance to Ukrainian civilians and military personnel. Latvia has provided medical treatment and rehabilitation to Ukrainian soldiers injured in the hostilities in Ukraine since 2014. Latvia will continue supporting the reform process being implemented by the Ukrainian Government to strengthen democracy, the economy and good governance, including through our bilateral development cooperation programme.

The conflict in Ukraine remains a challenge to international security. Until the aggression ceases and Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity are restored, its peaceful settlement must remain a high priority on the international agenda. Latvia will remain vocal in its unequivocal policy of non-recognition of the illegal annexation of Crimea.

**Mr. Arbeiter** (Canada). First, allow me to thank the President of the General Assembly for convening

today's debate at a very symbolic time. I also want to thank President Poroshenko for his compelling address.

The people of Ukraine took to the streets five years ago. Many made sacrifices — and some gave their lives — to demand reform and advance their country's transition. Despite many challenges, in the years since then Ukraine has achieved remarkable progress towards ensuring a stable, democratic and prosperous future for its people.

Since becoming the first Western nation to recognize Ukraine's independence, in 1991, Canada has supported Ukraine's democratic and economic transition, including during and following the Euromaidan revolution. Through it all, Canada has remained steadfast to its commitment to the people of Ukraine. As Ukraine builds towards elections this year, the importance of free and fair elections, without foreign interference, cannot be understated. That is why Canada, at the request of and in cooperation with Ukraine's authorities, is supporting electoral reforms, election observers, gender equality and inclusive governance in Ukraine.

It has been five years since Russia illegally invaded and annexed Crimea and destabilized the east of Ukraine — five years of violations of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and five years during which the rules-based international order has been put the test. As others have said, this is not a bilateral or European issue, but a global one. Let me be clear: Canada will never cease to condemn Russia's illegal annexation and occupation of Crimea. We will not fail to call out Russia for its ongoing support to the insurgency in eastern Ukraine. Respect for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity is not a policy choice or a question of political orientation, it is international law.

We remain deeply concerned about the ongoing military and civilian casualties and violations of international human rights law and humanitarian law. Civilians continue to suffer and die — more than 3,300 have been killed since the beginning of the conflict, countless others have been injured and millions have been displaced.

*(spoke in French)*

Despite concerted efforts, we have seen little progress in the implementation of the Minsk agreements. Russia respects neither the letter nor the spirit of the

agreements it signed. While we have seen a succession of truces, none have led to a significant improvement in the security situation or in the lives of Ukrainians living in the conflict-affected areas. We call on all sides to the conflict to implement their Minsk commitments. Every Member State must stand up for the Charter of the United Nations and press Russia to fulfil its obligations under the agreements, including the withdrawal of all armed formations, military equipment and mercenaries from Ukrainian territory, as well returning control of the border to the Ukrainian Government.

Let us not forget last November's illegal actions by Russia in and around the Kerch Strait, which have caused only further regional instability and endangered lives. We continue to call for the immediate release of the Ukrainian sailors and vessels held by Russia. Now is the time to seriously consider ways by which the United Nations, an organization with the purpose of maintaining international peace and security, can support Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and its return to peace. Canada stands ready to do its part. Any solution will need to recognize Ukraine's full sovereignty over all its territory.

Let me conclude by underlining once again that Canada has been, and remains, unwavering in its support for Ukraine as it secures a stable, democratic and prosperous future for all its citizens.

**Mr. Cohen** (United States of America): The United States would like to thank the President of the General Assembly for convening today's important meeting. We also welcome President Poroshenko and thank him for joining us today.

Five years ago the world bore witness to Russia's brazen occupation and purported annexation of Crimea and its intervention in eastern Ukraine. Russia continues to lead and fight alongside its proxy authorities in Donbas, despite commitments in the Minsk agreements that call for a ceasefire, the withdrawal of foreign armed formations and the disarmament of illegal groups. Within only a week of signing, Russia grossly violated the agreements by ordering tank units, manned by Russians, to take the key rail hub of Debaltseve, killing over 100 Ukrainian soldiers and seizing hundreds of square kilometres on the Ukrainian side of the line of contact of 19 September, to which Russia itself had agreed. Some of the Ukrainian soldiers captured in Debaltseve remain held by Russia four

years later — again in violation of the Minsk pledge to release all captives.

Moscow continues to destabilize Ukraine and to attempt to make it subservient to Russia. In reality, Russia is pushing Ukraine and its people further away from Russia and strengthening Ukraine's resolve to defend its freedom and independence. The international community should remain united in support of Ukraine and impose costs on Russia for those attempts to undermine Ukraine.

The United States stands firmly with Ukraine in the face of Russia's aggression. We are committed to the success of a stable, prosperous, democratic and free Ukraine. As we have repeatedly said, the United States does not, and will not, recognize the Kremlin's purported annexation of Crimea. We will never accept anything less than the full restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity. Our Donbas-related sanctions will remain in place until Russia fully implements the Minsk agreements. Our Crimea-related sanctions will also remain in place until Russia returns control of the peninsula to Ukraine.

As we approach the fifth anniversary of Russia's illegal seizure and occupation of Crimea, Russia has regrettably provided a fresh reminder of why the international community must remain firm, when Russia attacked and seized Ukrainian vessels and crew members in the Black Sea on 25 November 2018. We call on Russia to immediately release the vessels and crew and cease obstructing, delaying and harassing the transit of vessels in the Kerch Strait to and from Ukrainian ports.

Russia has attempted to justify its aggression against Ukraine by saying it is defending Russian-speaking people. However, Russian aggression has been disastrous for the people living in those regions, who have seen the humanitarian situation continue to deteriorate. The United Nations estimates that the conflict has taken over 10,000 lives. Beyond that toll, 1.5 million people have been internally displaced and 3.5 million are in dire need of humanitarian assistance.

The elderly, who account for most of the crossings at the contact line between the Government and non-Government-controlled areas of Ukraine, face treacherous conditions in their journey to see relatives and access Ukrainian Government services. Many others have been hurt or maimed by episodic violence, heavy weaponry and the hidden menace of landmines.

The profound impact of the conflict does not end there. More than 1.1 million people are food insecure or need support, and schools, universities and business struggle to operate.

In Crimea Russia is engaging in a campaign of coercion and violence to suppress any voice that questions its occupation, including by misusing counter-terrorism and so-called anti-extremism laws to suppress dissent, as Russia attempts to further consolidate its occupation of the peninsula. Russian occupation forces also raid, harass, detain, deport and forcibly conscript members of the Crimean Tatar community, ethnic Ukrainians and others who support Ukrainian sovereignty over Crimea. The United States calls on Russia to immediately release the more than 70 Ukrainians it has unjustly imprisoned, including Oleg Sentsov, Oleksandr Kolchenko, Volodymyr Balukh and Ruslan Zeytullayev.

Russia has also created a hostile and dangerous environment for journalists, media workers, human rights defenders and defence lawyers to perform their work independently and without interference in Crimea. Russia must ensure the proper and unimpeded access of international human rights monitoring missions and human rights non-governmental organizations to Crimea and cease any abuse against individuals there, without any discrimination.

The United States will continue to draw on the range of measures we have at our disposal, including diplomacy, sanctions and security assistance, to support Ukraine and make clear to Russia that the only resolution the international community can accept is the end of Russia's efforts to undermine Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We will continue to coordinate our efforts with the many other countries supporting Ukraine. Ukrainians have repeatedly shown that they will not be deterred from charting their own course. The United States will stand with the Ukrainian people until there is an end to Russian aggression.

**Mr. Wenaweser** (Liechtenstein): The conflict in and around Ukraine is the central crisis in Europe today. Its geopolitical dimension calls for urgent attention by the United Nations. Sustained efforts have been undertaken in the framework of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to monitor the crisis and pursue possible avenues for political progress, in the spirit of Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations.

At the same time, we regret that the Security Council has so far failed to support such efforts politically and through concrete actions. As in other crises that the Security Council is unable to tackle, the General Assembly has a mandate and the responsibility to play a more active and meaningful role. Today's debate is therefore also an expression of complementarity between both Charter organs, which Liechtenstein strongly supports. We reaffirm our long-standing support for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.

The armed conflict, fuelled by Russian intervention in Ukraine, has caused a humanitarian catastrophe that is particularly acute as we hold this debate. More than 10,000 people have been killed and many more wounded in the course of the conflict. The civilian population in Donbas suffers from the full hardship the Ukrainian winter imposes on them. Currently, 5.2 million people are affected by the conflict, with 3.5 million people in need of aid and 1.5 million internally displaced. Moreover, eastern Ukraine is now one of the most heavily mined places in the world, with severe consequences for present and future generations of Ukrainians. Civilians continue to wait for hours to cross the contact line in the bitter winter and scorching summer heat.

As the conflict continues, critical infrastructure has fallen further into disrepair and the economy has hit rock bottom. We highlight in particular the plight of the elderly, who make up 30 per cent of the people in need, the highest proportion in any crisis in the world. For 240,000 children going to school it means risking being shelled — a grave violation of international humanitarian law for which those with de facto control need to be held accountable. Reports of people moving into areas contaminated by the Chernobyl catastrophe are a particularly sad expression of the desperation felt in Donbas right now. Liechtenstein has consistently contributed to humanitarian relief efforts in Ukraine since the beginning of the conflict, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups. We renew our commitment to alleviating the suffering of civilians in this appalling humanitarian crisis in our region.

Only a comprehensive and sustainable ceasefire can create the conditions to ameliorate the humanitarian situation. However, as noted by the head of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) and the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-

Office in Ukraine, that cannot occur until the parties show the requisite political will. Four years after the signing of the Minsk agreements, the ceasefire and other vital parts of the agreements continue to be violated on a continual basis — a state of affairs that is unacceptable and should be an urgent matter for discussion in this Organization. Parties to the conflict must withdraw their heavy weapons and respect the ceasefire, including the Trilateral Contact Group's framework decision relating to the disengagement of forces and hardware in eastern Ukraine. There must be free and unhindered access for SMM observers to all areas in eastern Ukraine. In addition, parties must not impede the work of the SMM or target its personnel or assets, including surveillance drones. Russia's provocative actions in the Kerch Strait and the Sea of Azov further add to the already heightened security risks, which extend far beyond the region, as they constitute serious violations of the United Nations Charter.

Liechtenstein calls for the immediate and full implementation of the Minsk agreements and a renewed commitment by all parties to the conflict to a sustainable political solution. The provisions on self-governance and decentralization under the Minsk agreements are particularly important in that regard. We commend and support the work of the Special Representative, as he currently pursues the most tangible avenue to bring the main stakeholders to a peaceful and effective settlement of the conflict. The Security Council should fully support those efforts in line with its mandate, in particular under Chapters VI and VIII of the Charter.

Next month's presidential election will be an important step for Ukraine and its democratic institutions. Liechtenstein expresses its hope that the election will result in a clear mandate for the newly elected leadership to address the significant challenges facing Ukraine, including necessary reforms at the domestic level in the area of the rule of law, such as the fight against corruption and the strengthening of accountable institutions.

In addition, many serious crimes committed in the course of the Ukraine crisis warrant a thorough criminal investigation. Liechtenstein welcomes Ukraine's declaration pursuant to article 12, paragraph 3, of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. We reiterate our call for Ukraine to ratify the Rome Statute, including the provisions giving the Court jurisdiction over the crime of aggression. That would send a strong and clear signal that the Government of

Ukraine is willing to address impunity for international crimes comprehensively and irrespective of who the perpetrators are.

**Mrs. Chatardová** (Czech Republic): The Czech Republic fully aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by the observer of the European Union.

The Czech Republic has a consistent and unambiguous position on Ukraine: we strongly condemn Russia's ongoing occupation of Crimea and the militarization of the peninsula. The occupation of Crimea and Russia's military engagement in eastern Ukraine are breaches of international law. Moreover, Russia's actions in Ukraine represent a direct threat to the global order and the principles of territorial integrity and sovereignty enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. Therefore, Russia must be reminded that it bears special responsibility for the resolution of this conflict and for the restoration of peace and security on the European continent.

In line with resolution 68/262, we are committed to a non-recognition policy towards Crimea, including the implementation of the restrictive measures of the European Union. The measures targeting Russia for the aggression in eastern Ukraine are tied to the full implementation of the Minsk agreements. Measures concerning Crimea shall remain in place until the territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders is fully restored.

We are deeply troubled by the human rights situation in Crimea and the systematic human rights abuses by the de facto authorities targeting Crimean Tatars. We urge the de facto Russian authorities to grant access to the occupied peninsula for international human rights observers. We also urge the immediate release of Oleg Sentsov, Stanislav Klykh and other Ukrainian citizens whose trials in Russia are apparently in breach of international law and elementary standards of justice.

The Czech Republic is highly concerned about the escalation of tensions in the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait. We consider the use of force against Ukraine's naval forces as a gross violation of international law. We strongly call on Russia to release the Ukrainian crew members that have been illegally detained since November 2018 and to ensure unhindered and free passage through the Kerch Strait to and from the Sea of Azov.

We call on both sides to resolve the situation in eastern Ukraine by peaceful means. In that regard, we expect all parties to meet the commitments of the Minsk agreements. That will require, inter alia, safe and unimpeded access for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission throughout Ukraine, including the Crimean peninsula and the Ukraine-Russia border.

**Mr. Imnadze** (Georgia): My country aligns itself with the statement made earlier today by the observer of the European Union. I would like to add the following comments in my national capacity.

Today marks the fifth anniversary of the beginning of Russia's aggression against its sovereign neighbour. Five years on, the situation in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine — Crimea and Donbas — remains alarming. The humanitarian consequences of those hostile actions are tragic, with tens of thousands killed or wounded and more than 1.5 million forcefully displaced.

With the occupation and annexation of Ukraine's sovereign territories, Russia has not only gravely violated the Charter of the United Nations, the Helsinki Final Act and other multilateral and bilateral agreements but also challenged the rules-based international order, in an attempt to redraw the borders in Europe. Moreover, Russia remains in violation of the Minsk agreements four years after the deal was endorsed by the Security Council.

Russia's aggression against Ukraine is a continuation of the same pattern it started in Georgia back in 2008, which resulted in the ongoing occupation of my country's Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions. Russia's behaviour against its sovereign neighbours seriously undermines security and stability in the European region. Its actions must be kept under the constant scrutiny of the international community and must be adequately assessed and addressed.

Developments in the Sea of Azov last November, specifically in the Kerch Strait, represent yet further blatant violation of international law and international maritime law by the Russian Federation. We condemn Russia's attack against Ukrainian vessels and urge Russia to immediately release the seized vessels and their crew.

We deplore Russia's ongoing restrictions of and impediments to the work of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring

Mission to Ukraine (SMM) in the occupied areas of Donbas. We regret that the SMM's movement has been restricted, including in the areas adjacent to the Russia-Ukraine State border, in clear violation of the SMM's mandate, which covers the whole territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.

We remain deeply concerned by the systematic human rights violations in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, which include restrictions on the freedoms of movement, opinion, expression and association, as well as violations of the right to maintain one's identity, culture and tradition, and property rights. Regrettably, despite repeated requests, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has been denied access to the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.

We therefore reiterate our call for Russia to fulfil its Minsk commitments. We also take this opportunity to call on Russia to fulfil its obligations under the six-point ceasefire agreement of 12 August 2008. Finally, we reiterate our call for full, unhindered and immediate access for international mechanisms to the territories occupied by the Russian Federation in both countries.

In conclusion, let me once again reiterate Georgia's full support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.

**Mr. Panayotov** (Bulgaria): Bulgaria aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States.

I would like to reiterate Bulgaria's unequivocal support for Ukraine's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, including its maritime borders.

Bulgaria has consistently supported the peaceful settlement of the crisis in eastern Ukraine over the past five years. The full implementation of the package of measures for the implementation of the Minsk agreements remains the only viable and internationally recognized option in that regard. The necessary political will should therefore be exercised to ensure that ceasefire efforts hold and pave the way for progress on political, economic and humanitarian issues. At the same time, we strongly support and rely on the joint efforts of the Normandy Four and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Trilateral Contact Group for pressing on with the peace process.

Of no less importance is the work of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), which enjoys our full support. The Mission has been the eyes of the international community on the ground. Bulgaria condemns in the strongest possible terms all acts of aggression towards the SMM monitors and interference with their equipment. We also underline the importance of ensuring their unimpeded access throughout the whole of Ukraine, including east of Mariupol, along the Ukraine-Russia State border and on the Crimean peninsula.

As a Black Sea littoral State, Bulgaria shares the concerns about the ongoing militarization of the Kerch Strait and the Sea of Azov. Together with the militarization of the Crimean peninsula, that has a severe negative impact on the security situation in the Black Sea region and beyond. Furthermore, we are deeply concerned about the dangerous escalation of tensions near the Kerch Strait, which undermines the security of the entire region. The full restoration of the freedom of passage through the Kerch Strait, in accordance with international law, and the immediate release of the Ukrainian servicemen and vessels, detained on 25 November, are key to preventing any further escalation of tensions in the Black Sea and Sea of Azov areas.

Turning now to the human costs, Bulgaria notes with concern the deteriorating human rights situation on the Crimean peninsula, as documented by the periodic reports of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the human rights situation in Ukraine. Bulgaria regrets that the United Nations human rights monitoring mission in Ukraine is still being denied access to Crimea. In view of that, we reiterate our support for the efforts of the international community to establish full, free and unhindered access for the Mission and other international human rights observers and monitoring mechanisms to the entire territory of Ukraine, including the Crimean peninsula. We also echo the EU's call for the release of all Ukrainian citizens held in Russia and on the Crimean peninsula in violation of international law, including international humanitarian law.

The continuing hostilities in eastern Ukraine have been taking an increasingly heavy toll on the Ukrainian people and economy. We condemn the civilian casualties and reiterate our deep concerns about the worsening social situation on both sides of the contact line in eastern Ukraine. The 2019 United Nations humanitarian response plan for Ukraine paints a grim picture of 2.3 million men, women and children in need of humanitarian assistance, while the number of those who suffer either directly or indirectly from the consequences of the crisis is estimated to be 5.2 million. Given the evident international donor fatigue, we, the Member States of the General Assembly, should do our best to sufficiently fund this year's humanitarian response plan. Bulgaria therefore welcomes the new funding mechanism — the Ukraine humanitarian pooled fund, which aims to address the most severe underfunded needs.

Bulgaria has been an active contributor to the efforts aimed at resolving the crisis and alleviating its consequences. We have been contributing to the OSCE toolbox on the ground, including with personnel to the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission. Bulgaria is one of the leading contributors of monitoring officers to the SMM. Additionally, we have provided humanitarian assistance for rehabilitation to various partners on the ground, including UNICEF. Moreover, we endorse the idea of additional EU humanitarian and economic support to address the deteriorating socioeconomic conditions in Ukraine's regions along the coast of the Sea of Azov.

In conclusion, we urge all sides to the conflict to fully implement the relevant General Assembly resolutions on Ukraine, including resolution 68/262, of 27 March 2014, as well as the recommendations contained in the United Nations human rights monitoring mission's reports.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in Spanish*): We have heard the last speaker in the debate for this meeting. We shall hear the remaining speakers this afternoon at 3 p.m.

*The meeting rose at 1 p.m.*