

KINGDOM OF BELGIUM

Statement delivered by

Marc PECSTEEN de BUYTSWERVE,
Permanent Representative
of Belgium to the UN

Arria formula meeting on Ukraine

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On March 6th, Estonia together with Belgium, France, Germany, the UK and the USA hosted an arria formula meeting on ‘The human rights situation in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol’. During this meeting several briefers, including the Assistant-Secretary-General (ASG) for Human Rights, and civil society briefers gave a first-hand account and expert assessment of the human rights situation on the ground. The conclusions of that meeting are in stark contrast with what we are hearing today.

Firstly, let me be clear with regard to the status of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. Belgium considers this as illegally annexed territory. In line with the EU’s position we will not recognize this annexation. We will continue to condemn this violation of international law. Belgium remains steadfast in its commitment to Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, including its territorial waters. We call on the Russian Federation to comply with its commitments under international law, including the UN Charter and the Helsinki Final Act.

Furthermore, the absence of respect for the rules-based international order has led to a deterioration of the human rights situation on the ground, with human rights and fundamental freedoms being severely restricted. Of specific concern, is the disproportionate targeting of ethnic and religious minorities, as became clear from the account of Mr. Refat CUBAROV, Chairman of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People during the arria-formula meeting in March. We also remain deeply concerned

about cases of interference and intimidation against journalists, human rights defenders and defence lawyers.

We call on the Russian Federation to release all political prisoners. We call for swift, impartial and thorough investigations in all cases of alleged human rights violations. Impunity only further exacerbates the already dire human rights situation.

Finally, we urge the Russian Federation to ensure unimpeded access of international human rights monitoring missions and human rights non-governmental organisations to Crimea in line with resolution 74/168. During her briefing in March the ASG for Human Rights made it clear that this has not been the case yet.

In conclusion, I would like to state that Belgium's participation is in no way an endorsement of the statements delivered by the briefers today or the account of events described in the concept note. To the contrary, we will continue to oppose the illegal annexation of Crimea and we call on the rest of the international community to do the same.

I thank you.

