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Intervention at

Arria formula meeting

“Crimea: 7 years of violations of Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity”.

New York, 12/03/2021

I would like to thank Estonia for taking the initiative to organize this important arria-formula meeting. I also thank the briefers for their detailed, yet sobering accounts.

7 years have passed since the illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol. 7 years during which the most fundamental norms of our international rules-based order continue to be blatantly disregarded. Today, I would like to reiterate Belgium’s steadfast commitment to Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, including its territorial waters. Together with our European partners we will continue to condemn this violation of international law and implement the EU’s non-recognition policy.

Like others before me, Belgium is deeply concerned about the increasing militarization of the peninsula which risks destabilizing the security situation in the Black Sea region . We call on Russia to respect its obligations under international humanitarian law, including by ceasing its attempts to change the demographic structure of the peninsula. We further call on Russia to ensure unhindered and free passage of all ships through the Kerch Strait to and from the Azov Sea, in accordance with international law. Illegal restrictions to such passage have negative economic consequences for Ukraine’s ports in the Azov Sea, as well as for the region as a whole.

As we have heard from ASG BRANDS KEHRIS, Crimeans continue to face multiple human rights violations and abuses. We are particularly concerned about the impact on minorities, such as the Crimean Tatars, as well as on journalists, human rights defenders and defence lawyers. All violations and abuses of human rights should be investigated in a thorough, impartial and independent manner. The decision of the European Court of Human Rights of 14 January 2021 constitutes an important step towards ensuring accountability. We further call for full and unimpeded access of regional and international human rights monitoring mechanisms as well as non-governmental human rights organisations to Crimea and Sevastopol in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 75/192.

In conclusion, let me underline once more that the illegal annexation of Crimea constitutes a grave breach of international law and the fundamental norms that also underpin this organization. It is the duty of the international community to continue to denounce this act.