



KINGDOM OF BELGIUM

Intervention by

H.E. Mr Marc Pecsteen de Buytswerve, Ambassador, Permanent Representative at the "Arria-Formula Meeting"

"A symbolic date : Fifth anniversary of the beginning of Russia's occupation of Crimea : a blatant violation of international law"

New York, 15 March 2019

Mr President,

Five years have passed since the annexation of Crimea in violation of international law. Since then, the security, humanitarian and economic situation in Crimea has only worsened day by day. Non-compliance with international law and the rules of international cooperation continues to have serious consequences, which primarily impact the local population.

Mr President,

The latest periodic report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights shows that the human rights situation in Crimea continues to be marked by restrictions on the exercise of fundamental rights and the absence of remedies for obtaining justice. In particular, this deterioration is having a disproportionate effect on ethnic and religious minorities in Crimea, as we heard this morning.

In this regard, we are concerned by the intimidation and harassment suffered by many human rights defenders and journalists. We urge Russia to release illegal prisoners arrested and/or detained in Crimea.

What can be done to counter this worrying development?

- We call on Russia to implement Resolution 73/263, in part by providing safe and unhindered access to international observers, including the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights;
- The international community must continue to denounce violations of human rights, international law and international humanitarian law and advocate compliance. In this regard, it must demand the prosecution of violations and an end to impunity;
- The Security Council has a key role to play as the ultimate guarantor of compliance by all States with their international obligations regarding the maintenance of international peace and security.

Mr President,

The events in the Sea of Azov, as a result of Russia's actions, and in particular the unacceptable use of force, have demonstrated how quickly the situation can deteriorate. In accordance with

international maritime law, we condemn any obstruction of navigation and freedom of passage in the Kerch Strait. The militarisation of Crimea and any illegal use of force may further destabilise the region.

We call on Russia to release the Ukrainian ships seized in the Sea of Azov and their crews as a matter of urgency.

Mr President,

I would like to conclude by reaffirming our unwavering commitment to the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders. The annexation of Crimea constitutes a serious violation of international law, which cannot be considered a fait accompli. We as an international community must continue to oppose this kind of action.