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President: Ms. Espinosa Garcés. (Ecuador)

In the absence of the President, Mrs. Imene (Namibia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 67 (continued)

The situation in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine

Mr. Heusgen (Germany): First of all, I would like to align myself with the statement made earlier today by the observer of the European Union (see A/73/PV.67).

I would also like to acknowledge the very passionate statement made by the Ukrainian President this morning.

Let me make three remarks concerning, first, the breach of international law that happened in Ukraine; secondly, the German contribution to the resolution of the crisis; and thirdly, the humanitarian situation.

First, I will address the grave breach of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. This morning, President Poroshenko mentioned the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances in his statement (see A/73/PV.67), and I would like to again draw attention to that international agreement. It was reached in 1994, and in it, Ukraine gave up its nuclear weapons in exchange for guarantees by Russia of national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Through Russia's aggression against Ukraine, including the invasion both in Crimea and the Donbas, Russia breached international law and the Budapest

Memorandum. Such violations constituted a severe setback for international law, as well as the international disarmament agenda, because what will other countries that are ready to give up their nuclear weapons think if they look at what happened to those commitments?

Germany condemns the illegal annexation of the Crimean peninsula and supports Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, in line with the Budapest Memorandum, signed by Russia. We call on Russia to cease its occupation of Ukrainian territories and end its financial and military support to separatists. Here, I turn to the Russian delegation. The Russian Ambassador said this morning that this chapter is closed and that Crimea is part of Russia (see A/73/PV.67). All of us must say that this is not the case — one cannot just breach international law and get away with it.

We are also concerned about the current negative developments with regard to the Sea of Azov. Again, that is a breach of international law. We call upon Russia to immediately release Ukrainian servicemen.

Secondly, we hold that there is clearly no military solution to the crisis. We must therefore do everything possible to find a political solution. In that regard, in 2014 Germany and France joined forces and created the so-called Normandy format, together with Ukraine and Russia. The Minsk agreements were included in that format and it continues to do everything it can to see to it that those agreements are implemented. We believe that those agreements are the only avenue through which tangible results can be achieved, which

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is why the Minsk process must be upheld. To that end, Germany and France are determined to push, within the Normandy format, towards achieving tangible progress and improving the situation of those who are the most affected.

When we talk about the results that have been achieved, we must acknowledge that the hostilities are indeed much reduced compared to 2014 and 2015, but much more remains to be done. We have to recognize that Ukraine has done a great deal — for instance, in adopting the special status law — but the crux of the problem of the Minsk agreements is in the first paragraph, which asked the parties to implement a ceasefire at a certain moment. Russia did not abide by that provision, which led, consequently, to distrust in Russia, thereby making it exceedingly difficult for the Ukrainian Government to get laws passed through the Verkhovna Rada, which just does not believe that Russia is serious.

Another area in which we are engaging is in supporting the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) observers. Here again, Germany would like to express its appreciation for what the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine has achieved under very difficult circumstances, and to praise all its efforts. We also believe that it needs to continue to do its work and we condemn all attacks against its patrols and assets, as well as the shooting down of the Mission's drones. There has been discussion about a United Nations deployment and Germany is ready to further explore, within the Normandy format, what a peacekeeping force could look like.

Thirdly, I will now address the humanitarian situation. We are very concerned about the dire humanitarian situation, in particular in the Donbas, which falls under Russia's responsibility. More than 13,000 civilians have lost their lives and there are around 2 million internally displaced persons. There are many steps that could be taken. I mentioned, for example, that the Stanytsia Luhanska bridge should be repaired. We call on both sides to scale up efforts to improve the humanitarian situation and ensure full access for all international humanitarian organizations.

With regard to political efforts, Germany is engaged in the Normandy format, and with respect to humanitarian support, we are the second-largest bilateral donor. We will continue our engagement with Ukraine.

We are also concerned about the grave human rights violations that have taken place. We are especially worried about the situation of the Crimean Tartars and the opponents to the annexation of Crimea. We urge Russia to finally grant the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights unimpeded access to the peninsula.

Let me close by recalling the protests that took place five years ago on the Maidan. Thousands of Ukrainians demonstrated for a free, democratic and sovereign Ukraine, and more than 100 demonstrators paid with their lives. We will not forget their engagement and hope. Germany will continue to stand by their side.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): I align myself with the statement made this morning by the observer of the European Union on behalf of the European Union and its member States (see A/73/PV.67).

We thank the delegation of Ukraine for its timely efforts to shine a spotlight on the situation in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. That occupation must not be allowed to persist. Five years of conflict have inflicted a heavy toll on many parties.

In that context, today I will focus on three issues: first, the people of Ukraine; secondly, the reform process; and thirdly, the international legal order.

First, with respect to the people of Ukraine, in five years more than 12,000 lives have been lost. Many innocent civilians have had their daily lives disrupted, lost their homes or become displaced. We thank the Secretary-General and all United Nations agencies for their continuous efforts to monitor the human rights situation and provide assistance wherever possible.

The reports of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) are very clear — the human rights situations on the Russian-occupied Crimean peninsula and in the non-Government-controlled areas in eastern Ukraine remain of deep and great concern. We urgently call on the Russian Federation to respect human rights on the Crimean peninsula and to allow full access to the human rights monitors. Furthermore, we call on all parties to the conflict in eastern Ukraine to fully implement their responsibilities under the Minsk agreements, commit to the ceasefire and allow full humanitarian access. Russia must halt its military and financial support to the armed formations in those areas.

It is important that OHCHR also continue to remotely monitor the human rights situation in those areas not currently controlled by the Ukrainian Government. The world needs to know what is happening. OHCHR should also have access to those areas. The words spoken by the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Assistance, Ursula Mueller, to the people of Ukraine during the Security Council briefing on 12 February should also echo in the Assembly Hall. “We have not forgotten them” (*S/PV.8461, p. 4*).

Let me also express compassion for the relatives and loved ones of the victims of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH-17. As my Minister Stef Blok stated in the Security Council on 29 May last year (see *S/PV.8270*), the Kingdom of the Netherlands will continue its work towards the full implementation of Security Council resolution 2166 (2014).

Secondly, the Ukrainian reform process is suffering from the ongoing conflict. As we all know, Ukraine has embarked on an ambitious and challenging path to reform its economy and society. We admire the important progress that has been made so far towards attaining those goals and we applaud the positive role played by Ukraine’s vibrant civil society in the process. But the conflict has put pressure on Ukraine’s economy, its institutions and the reform process. A clear example is the economic damage inflicted by the restrictions placed on shipping in the Sea of Azov by the Russian Federation since early last year. Tensions culminated on 25 November 2018. Russia must refrain from such negative practices.

We encourage the Ukrainian Government to continue implementing its important reform process for the prosperity and well-being of the Ukrainian people. The Kingdom of the Netherlands will continue to support the reform efforts bilaterally, through the United Nations and through other international institutions.

Thirdly, the conflict is taking a toll on the international legal order. In Ukraine, our international rulebook is in jeopardy. The illegal annexation of Crimea and the ongoing destabilizing role of Russia in the Donbas go directly against Article 2, paragraph 4, of the Charter of the United Nations on the prohibition of the use of force against the territorial integrity and political independence of any State.

Like others, I therefore reiterate our strong commitment to the sovereignty, political independence, unity and territorial integrity of Ukraine. I underline

the points made by our German colleague just now on the Budapest Memorandum. It is high time that the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly confirming the territorial integrity and unity of Ukraine were implemented. Let me especially highlight resolution 68/262, of 2014, on the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

Let me end by reiterating that sustainable peace and stability in the region will be possible only if and when the Russian Federation returns to respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.

Ms. Bavdaž Kuret (Slovenia): Slovenia welcomes today’s debate on the situation in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.

Slovenia aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union (see *A/73/PV.67*) and I would like to make some additional remarks in my national capacity.

Let me start by expressing Slovenia’s firm support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. Slovenia does not recognize the illegal annexation of the Crimean peninsula. The annexation poses serious challenges to security and stability in the wider region.

The recent escalation of tensions in the Sea of Azov and in the Kerch Strait is a case in point. We join in the calls for the release of the detained Ukrainian servicemen and expect Russia to ensure unhindered and free navigation and passage through the Kerch Strait, in accordance with international law. We remain concerned about the growing militarization of the Crimean peninsula, the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov.

The repeated ceasefire violations, accumulation of heavy weapons and dire humanitarian situation in the conflict zone are also matters of grave concern to us. Measures aimed at the protection of the local population — such as the safeguarding of civilian infrastructure, demining, unhindered access of humanitarian organizations and assistance to the conflict areas — are of paramount importance. We call on all sides to swiftly and fully implement all obligations committed to in the Minsk agreements. We also find it unacceptable that the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine continues to face major restrictions in the territories not controlled by the Ukrainian Government.

The continuation of human rights abuses, both in the Crimean peninsula and in the non-Government-controlled areas in eastern Ukraine, is also particularly worrisome. We call for the full, free and unrestricted access of the international human rights observers and monitoring mechanisms to the illegally annexed Crimean peninsula, as well as to the non-Government controlled areas in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

In conclusion, let me emphasize that Slovenia will continue to offer medical and psychological rehabilitation to children from the conflict areas. We are also looking into possibilities for further humanitarian assistance, including in the field of humanitarian demining, when all necessary conditions are in place.

Ms. Bird (Australia): It is now almost five years since Crimea's annexation — an act the Assembly recognized as illegal in resolution 68/262. Today, we mark the fifth anniversary of the Maidan protests in Ukraine. It is critical that the Assembly keep the situation in Ukraine and the ongoing violations of international law there on its agenda.

Australia is firmly committed to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within internationally recognized borders. Australia backs up that commitment with a robust set of sanctions designed to respond to ongoing threats to Ukrainian sovereignty. We deplore the Russian-backed authorities' reportedly unfair administration of justice in Crimea and their attacks on basic freedoms of expression and association there. We note with concern the deregistration of Jehovah's Witnesses in Crimea.

Australia is also concerned about the recent escalation of tensions in the Kerch Strait and adjacent seas. We are particularly concerned about the Russian Federation's seizure of Ukrainian naval personnel and vessels in waters near the Kerch Strait. We reiterate our calls on Russia to release Ukraine's sailors and vessels immediately and unconditionally. We also call on Russia to refrain from impeding the lawful exercise of navigational freedoms and rights in the Black Sea, the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait. Ukraine must be allowed unhindered access to its ports.

It is now close to five years since 290 innocent people, including 38 who called Australia home, were killed on Malaysia Airlines Flight MH-17. Australia remains committed to the implementation of Security Council resolution 2166 (2014), which condemned that horrific act and resolved to hold those responsible to

account. Australia's determination to establish the truth of the circumstances surrounding the downing of MH-17 will not diminish.

Australia does not recognize actions that seek to legitimize the Russian Federation's interventions in eastern Ukraine, including the so-called elections held in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in November 2018. The Minsk agreements remain the only agreed basis for resolving the situation in eastern Ukraine. We call on all parties to fulfil their commitments, particularly the implementation of a comprehensive and lasting ceasefire and the return of Ukraine's borders to Ukrainian control.

The purported annexation of Crimea and ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine are having a severe impact on civilians. More than 3,300 have been killed, with as many as 9,000 injured and 1.5 million people internally displaced. As Assistant Secretary-General Jenča noted last week (see S/PV.8461), the half-million people living within five kilometres of the contact line are exposed to periodic shelling, gunfire, landmines and unexploded ordnance. The area is among the most mine-contaminated in the world, and the impact of the conflict falls disproportionately on vulnerable groups such as the elderly and children. Australia urges all parties to guarantee unimpeded access to Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine and other international organizations. Finally, we call on all parties to redouble their efforts to resolve the conflict.

Mr. Lauber (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Switzerland thanks His Excellency President Poroshenko for his statement (see A/73/PV.67).

Five years after the annexation of Crimea, Switzerland's position remains firm and unwavering. We do not recognize the Russian Federation's annexation of Crimea, which constitutes a breach of international law. My country calls for respecting, protecting and implementing international law in Crimea, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, without discrimination of any kind. It is also important to ensure that international human rights monitoring mechanisms have rapid, genuine, safe and unhindered access to Crimea, which is why Switzerland has supported the resolution entitled "Situation of human rights in the Autonomous Republic

of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol”, which Ukraine has introduced in the Third Committee for the past three years.

Switzerland would also like to express its concern about the increased tensions in the Kerch Strait. The incident of 25 November 2018 near the Kerch Strait in the Black Sea demonstrated the potential for escalation in the region. Switzerland reiterates its support for Ukraine’s territorial integrity and sovereignty, including through its support for resolution 73/194, entitled “Problem of the militarization of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and city of Sevastopol, Ukraine, as well as parts of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov”. In that context, we want to stress that respect for international law is vital to reducing tensions. We have also paid close attention to developments surrounding the detention of Ukrainian sailors following the incident on 25 November. In that regard, Switzerland emphasizes that the sailors should be allowed to return to Ukraine as soon as possible. It is important to ensure that they are protected, as provided for by international law.

Ms. Velichko (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): Belarus has always adhered to the principles of a peace-loving and non-confrontational policy based on multilateralism and mutual respect. We have been closely following events in our neighbour Ukraine, whose peace and harmony are vitally important to us. A peaceful settlement of the conflict through dialogue and negotiation, an end to the violence and armed clashes and the parties’ compliance with the Minsk agreements remain the only workable basis for resolving the crisis. Our unfailing support for the process for a peaceful settlement of the conflict in south-eastern Ukraine continues, and we have contributed significantly to that process through our organization in Minsk of the Trilateral Contact Group on Ukraine and its working groups. Belarus intends to continue to provide all necessary assistance to restore peace in Ukraine. We are ready to further ensure the right conditions for negotiations on the Minsk platform in any format, including at the highest level, as we did in February 2015. We also call for a solution that is acceptable to all parties with regard to the parameters for the possible deployment of a United Nations peacekeeping mission in the region. We have repeatedly emphasized that we are ready to contribute to such a mission.

Belarus has never stood on the sidelines of consensus-based international efforts to support international peace and security. In 2015, President

Alyaksandr Lukashenko of Belarus, in his address to the General Assembly at its seventieth session (see A/70/PV.15), put forward a proposal on the need for a new, broad-based discussion on principles for States’ future coexistence in the context of ensuring universal peace and security. With that in mind, Belarus has launched an initiative for a new, broad-ranging international dialogue on security issues that should be focused on overcoming the current disagreements between States both within our region and throughout the entire Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian space, giving us an opportunity to ensure our future and geopolitical tranquillity, peace and security.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): We welcome today’s debate and the opportunity to discuss the situation in Ukraine. I would like to start by joining those of my colleagues who have reiterated their unwavering support to Ukraine’s sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, including within its internationally recognized borders and territorial waters.

Today marks the annual commemoration of the lives sadly lost during the 2014 euromaidan protests, and we offer our deepest condolences to the families of those who lost loved ones. Today also marks the fifth anniversary of the beginning of the Russian military operation aimed at illegally annexing Crimea from Ukraine.

Last week, my Russian colleague stood with Foreign Minister Arreaza of Venezuela in the Security Council and pledged to defend the Charter of the United Nations (see S/PV.8472). That includes respect for the sovereign equality of Members and for the territorial integrity and political independence of all States. However, the forcible Russian seizure of 10,000 square miles from Ukraine broke the first principle of international law — that countries may not acquire territory or change borders by force. It also violated a number of international agreements and commitments, including Article 2 of the Charter, the Helsinki Final Act, the Budapest Memorandum and the 1997 Treaty between the Russian Federation and Ukraine on Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership. The General Assembly reacted to Russia’s actions by adopting resolution 68/262 on 27 March 2014, affirming the territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders and the absence of any legal basis to change the status of Crimea.

As my German colleague said earlier in the Security Council in another context, to listen to the Russian account of what occurred in Crimea, one would think that it was Ukraine that had invaded Russia and not the other way around. We oppose the illegal annexation not only because it violates international law; but also because of the serious human rights violations that Russia continues to commit on the Crimean peninsula. That includes the widespread persecution of ethnic and religious groups, such as the Crimean Tatars and those who express opposition to the illegal annexation of the peninsula. In detention centres, such victims have been mistreated and tortured to punish or to extort confessions. It is no coincidence that Russia continues to ignore calls in General Assembly resolutions for the High Commissioner for Human Rights to visit Crimea.

The United Kingdom is also deeply concerned about the ongoing militarization of Crimea and the Sea of Azov by the Russian Federation. In December last year, the General Assembly adopted resolution 73/194, calling on the Russian Federation to withdraw its military forces from Crimea, which Russia has ignored. Only three months ago, the Russian Federation used force to seize three Ukrainian naval vessels and took 24 servicemen captive, including three who were severely injured during that incident. Russia's use of force, including the use of firearms against Ukraine's vessels, constituted clear aggression and escalation. These unacceptable actions are not in conformity with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and have no basis in international law. We cannot and will not ignore such a serious challenge to the international rules-based order. We call on the international community to continue to stand united and remain focused on Russia's behaviour and attempts to consolidate its illegal annexation of Crimea.

Turning to eastern Ukraine, the conflict there remains volatile, fuelled by Russia's total disregard for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Russia has incited and then supported military activity by armed formations, including through the deployment of Russian troops into Ukrainian territory. Russia's refusal to allow the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission to carry out its mandate within non-Ukrainian Government-controlled territories gives the impression that Russia has something to hide and threatens the basic security of Ukraine and of the wider region. Russia's concerted campaign to destabilize Ukraine includes its support

last November for illegitimate elections that did not represent the will of the people in the non-Government-controlled territories. Such action unnecessarily fuels tension between the parties to the conflict. Moreover, it is a clear breach of the Minsk agreements.

As with all conflicts, it is sadly civilians who suffer most. Since the fighting started, more than 10,000 people have lost their lives, almost 25,000 have been injured, 3.4 million are in need of humanitarian assistance and there are approximately 1.5 million internally displaced persons. Ukraine's crisis is not a frozen conflict. Russia created the conflict and rather than use its considerable influence to ensure that Russian-backed armed formations comply with their Minsk commitments, Russia continues to supply weaponry and personnel to those armed formations. Russia needs to withdraw its military personnel and weapons, cease its support for the armed formations and abide by the Minsk agreement commitments it signed up to. That would be a much more convincing way to demonstrate commitment to the principles of the founding Charter that governs the behaviour of the international community than by holding a press conference.

The United Kingdom once again calls on the international community to stand united behind Ukraine and oppose Russia's continued attempts to destabilize another State Member of the United Nations, undermine its sovereignty and steal its territory.

Mr. Sinirlioğlu (Turkey): Turkey's position with regard to the crisis in and around Ukraine is clear. We fully support Ukraine's territorial integrity, unity and sovereignty within its internationally recognized borders. We do not recognize the illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea.

With millions of citizens of Crimean Tatar descent, Turkey is following the human rights situation in Crimea very closely. Five years after the annexation, the activities of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people are banned on the peninsula and Crimean Tatar leaders still cannot enter Crimea. This year, we also commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the deportation of the Crimean Tatars from their historical homeland. We stand by the Crimean Tatars in their peaceful struggle for safety and freedom in their ancestral homeland. We will continue to help them voice their concerns on international platforms. Turkey has co-sponsored all resolutions of the United Nations related to the issue. We are also one of the most active supporters

of the efforts to release Ukrainian and Tatar political prisoners in Russia.

Almost five years after the beginning of the crisis, the situation remains tense in the Donbas. We believe that the Donbas conflict should be resolved through diplomacy and in line with international law. The full implementation of the Minsk agreements is important. The work of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, under the leadership of Ambassador Ertuğrul Apakan, has been critical and needs to be strongly supported by all parties. The Mission plays a key role in informing the international community, facilitating dialogue to reduce tensions and promoting stabilization and normalization throughout Ukraine. Turkey continues to fully support the Mission's work.

A democratic, well-governed and well-reformed Ukraine will contribute to stability in the wider region. We commend the Ukrainian Government for its reform efforts in difficult circumstances. Turkey and Ukraine are partners and Black Sea neighbours. We share concerns about the deterioration of the security environment in the Black Sea. Unilateral actions go against international law and negatively affect stability in the wider Black Sea region. We will continue to contribute to all efforts aimed at de-escalating tensions on the ground and finding a peaceful solution to the situation in Ukraine.

Mr. Drobnjak (Croatia): Croatia fully aligns itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union (see A/73/PV.67). I will make some additional comments in my national capacity

Croatia remains fully committed to supporting the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine and to pursuing a policy of non-recognition of the illegal annexation of Crimea. We express our utmost concern about the dangerous increase of tensions in the region, which led to the incident around the Kerch Strait and the Crimean peninsula last year. The use of force by Russia is unacceptable and without justification, especially in the context of increasing militarization in the area. We call on Russia to release the seized Ukrainian vessels and their crews unconditionally and without delay. Freedom of passage through the Kerch Strait, as well as unhindered access and freedom of navigation to Ukrainian ports in the Sea of Azov must be ensured, in line with international law and norms.

The conflict in eastern Ukraine continues to pose a serious threat to international peace and security. It is important to reiterate that this is not a frozen conflict, but one in which people are being killed on an almost daily basis. It also has dire consequences for millions of civilians living in and near the conflict zone. Over 5 million Ukrainians are exposed to this conflict and Ukraine is the ninth largest country in terms of the number of internally displaced persons.

The Minsk process and the full implementation of the Minsk agreements remain key to achieving a sustainable, peaceful and comprehensive political solution. To that end, we fully support all diplomatic efforts, including those within the Normandy format and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). In that regard, I would like to stress how important it is for the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine to have safe, secure, unconditional and unimpeded access throughout the entire territory of Ukraine.

Croatia is deeply concerned about the deterioration of human rights and the humanitarian situation in eastern Ukraine, as well as in Crimea. We support the work and reports of the United Nations High Representative for Human Rights and the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine. It is also necessary that full, free and unhindered access to the entire territory of Ukraine for international human rights observers be secured.

The European Union has provided significant humanitarian and other aid to Ukraine over the past several years. Croatia is active in providing humanitarian assistance through projects, such as the rehabilitation of Ukrainian children in our resorts on the Adriatic coast and programmes for the psychosocial rehabilitation of war veterans.

We are particularly concerned over the extreme levels of landmines and unexploded ordinance contamination that continue to exact a heavy toll on civilian life in and near the conflict zone, especially as we have first-hand knowledge of the devastating effects of anti-personnel landmines on civilians. We stress the need for greater international efforts in humanitarian demining.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): France aligns itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union.

Five years have already elapsed since the illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol by Russia. Despite the guarantees it provided when it signed the Budapest Memorandum, whereby it would respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders, Russia has brazenly violated the principles and purposes of the United Nations since 2014. This situation is a source of extremely worrisome tensions, especially in the Kerch Strait, the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov.

I need only mention the unacceptable use of military force, the detention of 24 Ukrainian crew members and the excessive number of inspections conducted by the Russian coast guard in the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait since last spring. Following the serious naval incident that occurred on 25 November last year, it is more necessary than ever that commercial and military vessels alike be assured safe, free and unobstructed passage, in accordance with international law. Once again, we call for the immediate and unconditional release of all Ukrainian servicemen.

Above and beyond the deterioration of the security situation, the illegal annexation of Crimea has led to serious and repeated violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms of the people living in that territory, including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions, abductions, forced disappearances and discrimination, to name just a few. We call on Russia to put an end to that policy, which is clearly aimed at terrorizing anyone who dares to speak out strongly against the annexation of Crimea.

In parallel with our efforts to address the situation in eastern Ukraine in the framework of the Normandy format, we once again call on Russia to honour its international obligations and commitments and respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.

Mr. Al Arsan (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation reaffirms its steadfast position with regard to agenda item 67, entitled “The situation in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine”.

The Syrian Arab Republic remains convinced that the request to include this item on the agenda of the General Assembly was a unilateral and politicized attempt. My country’s delegation is concerned by the unjustified and growing negative tendency among several Member States to overload the Assembly’s

agenda and usurp the energies and resources of the United Nations with the sole objective of bringing political pressure to bear. That undermines the main and noble objectives and purposes of the United Nations and transforms this rostrum into a platform for practicing political and financial polarization, discord and disagreement instead of seeking unity in the service of peace, security and sustainable development for all without exception or discrimination.

Our balanced legal analysis is based on the self-evident truth that the situation in that region is governed by the provisions of the Minsk agreements. Those agreements were supported by the United Nations through Security Council resolution 2202 (2015) and all annexes thereto, as well as by its presidential statement S/PRST/2018/12. Based on this factual situation, my delegation is of the firm view that the implementation of the Minsk agreements and resolution 2202 (2015) requires the genuine political will of all parties to work together to restore security and stability in Ukraine.

It is for those reasons that we consider agenda item 67 in general and today’s meeting in particular to represent a new, regrettable attempt to hinder the implementation of the Minsk agreements and the relevant Security Council resolution, and to undermine international efforts to settle the conflict and implement all the measures supported by the Normandy quartet to resolve the crisis in Ukraine.

We once again draw the Assembly’s attention to a substantial legal assessment of the issue. The consideration of this issue by the General Assembly is a violation of Article 12 of the Charter of the United Nations. The insertion of the term “temporarily occupied territories” in the title of agenda item 67 does not change the fact that this is an issue that falls exclusively under the purview of the Security Council and the implementation of its resolution 2202 (2015). We therefore must ensure the implementation of the first paragraph of Article 12 of the Charter, which states:

“While the Security Council is exercising in respect of any dispute or situation the functions assigned to it in the present Charter, the General Assembly shall not make any recommendation with regard to that dispute or situation unless the Security Council so requests.”

In conclusion, ensuring security, peace and prosperity for the peoples of the world is a common

objective that assumes that we shoulder collective responsibility for achieving it through the United Nations mechanisms and international relations at the bilateral and multilateral levels. Nevertheless, in order to implement this noble common objective, we must first build collective trust and remove any impediments and suspicions among the Governments of the world's States.

With regard to the attempt — intentional or not — by some among us to impose upon the General Assembly agenda items and to hold meetings for the sole purpose of making hostile political statements and positions, that would only widen divisions and disagreements, undermine trust in our international relations and cause harm to the General Assembly's function, role and credibility.

Mr. Cooreman (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): Belgium aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union (see A/73/PV.67).

I would like to begin by reaffirming our unwavering commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. In accordance with resolution 68/262, we do not recognize the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia, which we believe runs counter to international law. It violates the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and undermines the international legal order.

Today marks the fifth anniversary of the illegal annexation by Russia and of the outbreak of the conflict in eastern Ukraine. Since then, more than 10,000 people have lost their lives and more than 1.5 million people have left the region. The Minsk agreements were signed to put an end to the conflict in the Donbas. Although it is the only way to achieve a lasting political solution to the conflict, the implementation of the key provisions of those agreements remains a dead letter. We therefore call on all parties to swiftly and fully implement the Minsk agreements and to honour their commitments.

We support the efforts undertaken in that regard by the Trilateral Contact Group, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Normandy format. We call on Russia to immediately stop fuelling the conflict by providing financial and military support to armed groups. We call on Russia to use its influence on those armed formations to encourage them to fully respect their commitments under the Minsk agreements.

We regret the obstacles to the fulfilment of the monitoring and reporting tasks of the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. The Mission plays an indispensable role in reducing tensions. We strongly encourage the parties to the conflict to respect the mandate of the Mission and to allow it safe and unimpeded access to all Ukrainian territory, including in Crimea and along the Ukrainian-Russian border.

We remain very concerned about the humanitarian situation in eastern Ukraine. We urge all parties to allow full, lasting and unhindered access, in accordance with humanitarian principles. We are particularly concerned by the fact that crucial civilian infrastructure, such as water supply infrastructure, is being targeted. Three and a half million people are in need of assistance and protection owing to the widespread presence of landmines, increasing psychological trauma and a lack of access to basic services.

The events in the Sea of Azov demonstrate how lack of respect for the international legal order and the fundamental rules of international cooperation can lead only to increased instability and tensions. We condemn the use of force, which could destabilize the region. We call on Russia to release without delay all Ukrainian ships seized in the Sea of Azov and their crews. We call on Russia to guarantee free passage in the Kerch Strait and the freedom of navigation in the Sea of Azov, in accordance with international maritime law and the Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership between Ukraine and the Russian Federation. We urge Russia to put an end to the gradual militarization of Crimea, the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait.

We are also concerned about the deteriorating human rights situation in the Donbas and Crimea. In that regard, we support the work undertaken by the human rights monitoring mission of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and call on the parties to provide safe and unimpeded access to international observers, in particular the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe.

Five years have passed since the beginning of this conflict and the annexation of Crimea, and we must overcome the differences between the parties and resume the dialogue, which is essential to achieving a just and lasting peace.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item. The General Assembly

has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 67.

Agenda item 7 (continued)

Organization of work, adoption of the agenda and allocation of items

The Acting President: The General Assembly will now turn to a note by the Secretary-General contained in document A/73/101/Rev.1/Add.1, under sub-item (a) of agenda item 117, entitled “Appointment of members of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions”.

Members will recall that the General Assembly concluded its consideration of sub-item (a) of agenda item 117 at its 35th plenary meeting, on 15 November 2018. In order for the Assembly to consider the document today, it will be necessary to reopen consideration of sub-item (a) of agenda item 117.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to reopen consideration of sub-item (a) of agenda item 117?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: Members will also recall that at its 3rd plenary meeting, on 21 September 2018, the General Assembly decided to allocate this sub-item to the Fifth Committee. To enable the Assembly to proceed expeditiously on the sub-item in this meeting, may I take it that the Assembly wishes to consider sub-item (a) of agenda item 117 directly in plenary meeting and proceed immediately to its consideration?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 117 (continued)

Appointments to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other appointments

(a) Appointment of members of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

Note by the Secretary-General (A/73/101/Rev.1/Add.1)

The Acting President: As indicated in document A/73/101/Rev.1/Add.1, the Secretary-General has received notification of the resignation of Mr. Carlos Ruiz Massieu of Mexico from the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, effective

31 December 2018. The Assembly will therefore be required to appoint, at its current session, a person to fill the vacancy for the remaining period of the term of office of Mr. Ruiz Massieu, which expires on 31 December 2019.

As also indicated in document A/73/101/Rev.1/Add.1, the Government of Mexico has nominated Mr. Felipe García Landa to fill the vacancy arising from the resignation of Mr. Ruiz Massieu.

The Secretariat has been informed by the Chair of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States that the candidature of Mr. García Landa has been endorsed by the Group. May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to appoint Mr. Felipe García Landa of Mexico as a member of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions for a term of office beginning on the date of appointment and expiring on 31 December 2019?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of sub-item (a) of agenda item 117?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 7 (continued)

Organization of work, adoption of the agenda and allocation of items

The Acting President: In his note, contained in document A/73/747, the Secretary-General informs the General Assembly that Mr. Eric Solheim, the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, resigned effective 22 November 2018. Consequently, it will be necessary, at the current session, to elect a new Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme.

In this connection, the Secretary-General has the honour to request, pursuant to rule 15 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, the inclusion in the agenda of the current session of an additional sub-item, “Election of the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme”, under agenda item 116, “Elections to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other elections”.

Owing to the nature of the item, unless there is an objection, may I take it that the General Assembly agrees that the relevant provision of rule 40 of the rules

of procedure, which would require a meeting of the General Committee on the question of the inclusion of this additional sub-item on the agenda, could be waived?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: May I take it that the General Assembly, on the proposal of the Secretary-General, wishes to include in the agenda of the current session an additional sub-item, "Election of the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme", as a sub-item of agenda item 116, under heading I, "Organizational, administrative and other matters"?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: This additional sub-item becomes sub-item (e) of agenda item 116.

May I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to consider this sub-item directly in plenary meeting?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: I should now like to consult members with regard to proceeding immediately to the consideration of sub-item (e) of agenda item 116.

In this connection, I would like to draw members' attention to the relevant provision of rule 15 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, which reads as follows:

"No additional item may, unless the General Assembly decides otherwise by a two-thirds majority of the members present and voting, be considered until seven days have elapsed since it was placed on the agenda and until a committee has reported upon the question concerned."

In the absence of an objection, I shall take it that the Assembly agrees to proceed immediately to the consideration of sub-item (e) of agenda item 116.

It was so decided.

Agenda item 116 (continued)

(e) Election of the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme

Note by the Secretary-General (A/73/747)

The Acting President: As indicated in the note by the Secretary-General, the General Assembly, in section II, paragraph 2, of its resolution 2997 (XXVII) of 15 December 1972, decided that the secretariat of the United Nations Environment Programme should be headed by the Executive Director of the Programme, who should be elected by the General Assembly, on the nomination of the Secretary-General, for a term of four years.

In its decision 70/420 of 13 May 2016, on the proposal of the Secretary-General, the General Assembly elected Mr. Eric Solheim of Norway as Executive Director of the Programme for a four-year term of office, beginning on 27 June 2016 and ending on 26 June 2020.

Following the resignation of Mr. Solheim on 22 November 2018, and after a thorough review and evaluation of candidates proposed to succeed him, the Secretary-General wishes to nominate Ms. Inger Andersen of Denmark for election as Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme for a term of four years. The effective date of her appointment will be communicated to the Assembly at a later stage.

Accordingly, may I take it that the General Assembly wishes to elect Ms. Inger Andersen as Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme for a term of four years?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of sub-item (e) of agenda item 116.

The meeting rose at 4.10 p.m.