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UCCA Condemns the Restoration of Russia Into the Council of Europe

New York (UCCA) - As a result of unprecedented pressure and financial blackmail by the Russian Federation, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) unconditionally surrendered their legitimacy with the restoration of the Russian Federation's voting rights at the Council of Europe, ignoring the Council's own findings that the Russian Federation had repeatedly violated the Statute of the Council of Europe and Russia's commitments to the Council.

Since the invasion of Ukraine began in 2014, the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America (UCCA), the largest representation of Americans of Ukrainian descent, has urged decisive action against the Russian Federation from the law-abiding international community of free nations, warning that anything less would merely embolden Russia and would undermine the very foundation of regional and global peace and security. Moreover, since April 2014, the Russian delegation to PACE had been stripped of its voting rights in the body, its right to be represented in the Bureau of the Assembly, the PACE Presidential Committee, the PACE Standing Committee, and the right to participate in election-observation missions.

Since that decisive action in 2014 (Resolution 1990), PACE has passed numerous additional resolutions condemning Russia's actions:

- For violating the rights of minorities in Crimea, in particular of Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians;
- For restricting access to Crimea to international organizations including the human rights bodies of the Council of Europe;
- For shutting down the Crimean Tatar television channel ATR, threatening Crimean Tatar organizations, banning the Crimean Tatar Mejlis, and banning Members of Ukraine's Parliament Mustafa Dzhemilev and Refat Chubarov from returning to Crimea;
- Since 2015, PACE has passed numerous resolutions demanded that Russia withdraw all Russian troops, including covert forces, from Ukraine, release all hostages, prisoners of war and illegally held persons and immediately reverse the illegal annexation of Crimea.

And yet, less than a month after the United Nations Tribunal for the Law of the Sea ruled that Russian authorities must release 24 brave Ukrainian sailors captured in violation of International Maritime Conventions, and less than a week after the Dutch-led joint investigation team (JIT) announced charges against 4 Russian military assets for murdering all 298 passengers and crew aboard Malaysia Airlines flight MH17, 128 of 190 PACE delegates shamefully voted to send exactly the wrong signal to the country that has resorted to armed aggression and invasion of Ukraine and Georgia, the poisoning of European citizens with Soviet nerve agents, and actively seeks to destabilize democracies throughout Europe.

UCCA condemns the Council of Europe's decision to restore full rights to Russia in the Council, and stands with the nations of Ukraine, Georgia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Slovakia following their courageous walkout of PACE. The defiant statement of these delegations to the European continent calls into question the future of the Council of Europe, which they see as "losing the trust of the people it stands to protect."

Today, the citizens of Crimea and areas of Eastern Ukraine live under constant threat of terror from their Russian occupiers, and over 100 Ukrainians remain incarcerated in Russian jails, abducted illegally from their homeland. Only through continued international pressure, including maintaining and increasing EU and United States sanctions, will the Russian Federation be persuaded to cease violating international law, and remove itself from all international recognized Ukrainian territory.

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