STATEMENT

by Mr. Andrey Belousov,
Deputy head of the delegation of the Russian Federation
to the First Committee of the 73rd session of the UN General Assembly
on “Regional disarmament and security” cluster

New York, 31 October 2018

Distinguished Mr. Chairman,

Distinguished colleagues,

Russia treats the issues of regional security with all responsibility. Together with our CSTO allies and SCO partners, we work on potential joint steps to address new challenges and threats to regional security, to settle the existing conflicts and to ensure peace and stability. We actively participate in the discussions within the framework of “structured dialogue” on various aspects of the European security.

At the same time, we note with concern the activity of our Western partners aimed at undermining the regional security in Europe. Under the motto of the need to contain the threat from the East the unprecedented overall build-up of conventional weapons and military potential is going on in the Eastern flank of the NATO. The springboards for operative projection of force from North America to Europe are being
created in the Baltic states in order to increase the military potential and deploy additional military contingents of the NATO and the U.S. in the Baltic States, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria.

We are especially concerned with the growing military activity of the NATO countries along the Russian border throughout its Western expanse (from the Baltic to the Black Sea). For instance, the number of foreign troops deployed in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Poland has increased from 2 to 11 thousands from 2015 to 2018. These forces possess all types of offensive weapons.

The intensity of reconnaissance and tactical aviation flights of the joint air forces of the alliance has substantially risen since 2015. We note a sharp increase in the U.S. AF B-52H and B-1B strategic bombers involvement in the coalition exercises conducted in the Baltic and Scandinavian states. The number of strategic bombers missions in Europe has grown 12-fold – from 6 in 2014 to 72 in 2017 and from early 2018 more than forty sorties have been conducted.

The calls of ships of the NATO joint naval forces to the Baltic and Black Seas have intensified. In 2016, 39 such calls were recorded, whereas, in 2017, their number increased up to 74.

Our main difference from the NATO countries and their U.S. leader is that we conduct drills within our borders, while the U.S. is using the territory of its allies. Moreover, during these exercises we do not use special groups wearing NATO uniform or armed with weapons produced in NATO unlike the usual alliance practice when some servicemen are dressed in the Russian uniform. All our exercises are of the defensive or counterterror nature, which cannot be said about the NATO ones.

The NATO tests do have a clear anti-Russian character, regardless of the region where they are conducted, be it Northern Europe or its Southern regions.

We regard as negative also the fact that more and more neutral states get involved in the military drills with anti-Russian implication. This is clearly evidenced by the “Trident Juncture-2018” conducted with participation of Sweden and Finland.
One should not forget either the financial implications. Under the U.S. pressure, the total financial expenditures of the NATO countries continue to grow. This year the prospective level of 2% GDP was established for the NATO countries and at the same time it was recommended to reach the level of 4%. The U.S. military budget is also increasing and its amount will reach another record level in 2019. This is happening at the time when Russia is gradually reducing its defense expenditures. These statistical data together with the updated U.S. defense strategy are a clear indication of the real objectives of our American partners and their allies.

Russia espouses a different approach. We call for removing misunderstanding and reducing tension through a dialogue based on mutual respect. It is impossible to strengthen the security architecture in the situation of obvious lack of confidence and while the NATO policy and military planning made a pivot to the schemes of “containment” of Russia. In this context, the recent statements of the U.S. administration on the intent to withdraw from the INF treaty and to build up nuclear armaments are considered by us as a negative factor, which aggravates the problems of security, both in Europe and globally.

The restoration of normal relations may be based only on mutual respect of each other’s interests and equal and indivisible security for all. The same can be said also about confidence measures, which can hardly be built in a situation of confrontation. Let me emphasize in this connection that the Russian military activity remains under strict international control and we act in a transparent manner including the application of the provisions of the Open Skies Treaty and the 2011 Vienna document. At this stage, we see no need for the Vienna document modernization. The decisions adopted during the last five years by the Forum on Security Cooperation are being implemented. Moreover, it is difficult to envisage the VD modernization when there is no clarity regarding the destiny of its related conventional weapons control regime in Europe. In this situation, it is more appropriate to focus on faithful implementation of the existing VD requirements.
Regarding the Open Skies Treaty let me emphasize that Russia continues to strictly fulfill its obligations under this document. The attempts to exploit the Open Skies Treaty in order to settle the protracted regional conflicts are not only futile and counterproductive but risk to erode and devalue this multilateral instrument.

As to the Russian presence on the territory of some states, i.e. in Moldova – on the territory of Transnistria and in Abkhazia and South Ossetia we would like to emphasize once again that our troops are deployed there either on the basis of an international mandate as is the case in Transnistria or, on the basis of bilateral agreements with the independent sovereign states, as is the case of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The Russian military presence in these regions ensures stability, creates conditions for normal social and economic development and, most importantly, peaceful coexistence of people living in certain areas. This is a fact that the most ferocious critics of the Russian foreign policy cannot refute.

We consider the statement on militarization of Crimea and the Black and Azov Seas as pure propaganda with a goal to cover up the NATO plans to put this region under its control. Such plans are actively being implemented for example by the construction of a naval base in Nikolaev, Ukraine, and by conducting regular NATO naval exercises in the Black Sea.

Thank you for attention.