



United States Mission to the OSCE

Ongoing Violations of OSCE Principles and Commitments by the Russian Federation and the Situation in Ukraine

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Special Permanent Council, Vienna
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for convening this meeting—I appreciate the Chairmanship’s responsiveness to the concerns raised by my delegation and many others about the ongoing actions of the Russian Federation in and around Ukraine.

Colleagues, we have just heard from our distinguished Russian colleague. He read what Moscow has instructed him to read—but we all knew what he would say ahead of time—what he said did not surprise anyone. Because Moscow has established lines: they say that Russia has nothing to do with the actions in the last 48 hours that have led to “pro-Russia” separatist agents seizing a number of public buildings in towns in Eastern Ukraine. They say that these are the actions of local residents who have grievances. They say that Russia is deeply concerned by the grave situation in the East. They try to persuade you that the government in Kyiv is responsible. They say that Russia supports so-called federalization because it cares about Ukraine. They also say that the government of Ukraine should not undertake police or security actions to return seized buildings to government control. They profess great concern about violence and deep worries about what may be over the horizon. These are all core elements of Moscow’s current lines. We know they’re coming before they are spoken. And we also know that they are also based on lies and deceit, just like so much of what Moscow has said in the last month. Remember, colleagues, the Russian government has lied to each of us repeatedly in recent months—just remember the slew of lies about how there were no Russian special forces in Crimea, how they weren’t behind an illegal military incursion. They are doing it again.

In truth, there is an abundance of evidence that points to Moscow’s orchestration and direction of the highly-coordinated and professional operations that have taken place in strikingly similar fashion in more than a half dozen places in Eastern Ukraine.

In truth, eyewitnesses have reported on and filmed the kind of military equipment, uniforms, and command structure that shows that these coordinated efforts were carried out by specialized military or paramilitary units, not ordinary or local hoodlums. They are highly trained agents bearing Russian weapons. And they look like the same unidentified uniformed forces we saw in Crimea. The latest news that military / paramilitary units have seized the airfield in Slovyansk also follows the known pattern.

In truth, Russia is not deeply concerned by the situation in the east; Russia is causing the situation, and attempting to use it as a bargaining chip and a provocation to increase its leverage over the government in Kyiv.

In truth Russia isn't pushing federalization because it cares about anyone living in Ukraine. It is pushing federalization because it wants to weaken Ukraine and make it subservient to Moscow, to have the Kremlin call the shots in Ukraine's future, rather than the people of Ukraine. In truth, Putin's authoritarian government has centralized power in Russia, doing exactly the opposite of what it hypocritically purports to advocate for Ukraine.

In truth, the Russians aren't concerned about violence in the East—quite the contrary they have been working overtime to provoke it, and any caustic warnings that you may hear in this chamber or through other official statements are nothing more than a disingenuous effort to generate pretext for further illegal violations of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The Ukrainians' record of the last two months is one of remarkable restraint.

In truth, as Moscow peddles faux concern, in the last few days, PM Yatsenyuk and Acting President Turchynov have taken more steps to engage in the East and to accelerate Ukrainian-led constitutional reform, including measures aimed at enhancing local autonomy. The interim government has committed publicly to the rights of all Ukrainians and has dedicated itself to helping Ukrainians to collectively turn the page on the Yanukovich-era in presidential elections next month.

In truth, colleagues, what we've seen in Eastern Ukraine would not be happening without Russian support and action. This is not grassroots activism; this is Kremlin-produced criminality. Some have asked: Don't the people in the East have real grievances? Of course they do—they've been robbed blind by the corrupt and repressive Yanukovich government, as have their compatriots in other parts of the country. It's no surprise that they want their government—both local and national—to do better at serving Ukrainians rather than having Ukrainians serving governments. That's why reform is at the top of the agenda for the new government in Kyiv, and why it is likely to be on the agenda for any successful candidate in the upcoming elections. Numerous recent polls show that the vast majority of Ukrainians, no matter where they live, no matter what language they speak, want to live in a strong, peaceful, prosperous, democratic, unified Ukraine. The popular support for separatists is minimal—even in the places where the Russians have invested most in fomenting discontent and offering the false solution of association with Russia, it amounts to a significantly smaller fraction of the population than supports the far right parties in some European democracies these days—those are fringe groups, and so are these. So are there a few local knuckleheads stirred up in these actions along with paid pensioners and recruited hooligans? Most likely, sure. But that does not change the fundamental fact: this situation would not be happening without Russia's actions.

Many of you have seen, and I will circulate it to all of you, a fact sheet that lays out the falsehoods in some of Moscow's latest claims.

We should not be deceived. We should be resolute. Russia must make the choice to deescalate. Russia must make the choice to engage sincerely in diplomacy. The United States is still ready to meet with Ukraine, Russia and the EU in Geneva this week. The onus is on the Russian Federation to cease its destructive and dangerous behavior and to engage in diplomatic efforts to de-escalate.

That is why the United States renews the same call that we made at last week's PC:

1. Reverse the illegal purported "annexation" of Crimea and permit the OSCE special monitoring mission to visit the Crimean region;
2. Draw down the military forces massed on Ukraine's border;
3. Cease all efforts to destabilize Ukraine;
4. Publicly disavow the activities of separatists, saboteurs, and provocateurs;
5. Return Russian forces operating on Ukrainian territory in Crimea to their pre-crisis garrisons and numbers in accordance with existing bilateral agreements between Ukraine and the Russian Federation;
6. Invite additional Vienna Document visits to allow impartial observation by members of the international community of Russia's current military activities in the region of the Ukrainian border; and
7. Engage in bilateral dialogue with the government of Ukraine to address any legitimate concerns.

Colleagues, before closing, it's important to note that the members of the international community aren't the only ones the Kremlin is disrespecting through its continuing campaign of lies. The Russian people are getting lied to on a daily basis too. Having clamped down on free media and civil society, President Putin's authoritarian regime deprives the Russian public of independent, objective information, and insults them daily with new manipulations based on Kremlin propaganda. Of course many in Russia resent being treated like fools by their own government, many reject the garbage that emanates from Kremlin-controlled press. In fact, it should not be overlooked in this chamber that there were 10,000 courageous people who protested Russian propaganda in Moscow this weekend—a greater number than in any of the orchestrated "pro-Russian" protests in Eastern Ukraine. Lies can distract, but they can't change the truth. And truth will eventually prevail in Russia too—and when that happens, it will be a good thing not just because it will make Moscow less likely to threaten the security of others, but also because it will make Moscow more likely to serve the interests of the Russian people.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.