



United States Mission to the OSCE

Ongoing Violations of International Law and Defiance of OSCE Principles and Commitments by the Russian Federation in Ukraine

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires a.i. Kate M. Byrnes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 16, 2017

The United States strongly condemns acts of violence and intimidation directed at OSCE monitors. We call for a full investigation into the March 10 incident when mortar rounds struck near SMM monitors as they were monitoring the repairs of a gas line on separatist-held territory – repairs that supposedly enjoyed security guarantees from all sides. The forces responsible should be held to account for this incident, as should those combined Russian-separatist forces responsible for six other instances of threats and acts of violence against SMM monitors. We call on Russia to end these threats and acts of violence, and use its influence with the separatists to ensure the safety of OSCE monitors.

The United States is deeply concerned about the increasing risk to civilians in eastern Ukraine. Last week, the United Nations confirmed that fighting had claimed the lives of at least 20 civilians since the start of the year, and wounded over 91 more. Shelling has once again caused cuts to power and water for residents in the conflict area, increasing the risk of a humanitarian crisis and potential environmental catastrophe. The repeated nature of the shelling seems to suggest a deliberate attempt by combined Russian-separatist forces to target civilian infrastructure. We fully support efforts within the Trilateral Contact Group to agree to new disengagement areas, including around the Donetsk Water Filtration Station. We hope agreement on this and other critical infrastructure sites will be swiftly reached and implemented.

Monitors continue to observe an increase in the presence of heavy weapons in the security zone, largely in territory under the control of combined-separatist forces. Last week, the SMM identified 40 armored personnel carriers in Donetsk City. The week before, it spotted 12 tanks there on a single day. In total, the SMM has found 47 proscribed weapons in violation of withdrawal lines in territory under the control of combined Russian-separatist forces – more than twice the number observed on government-controlled territory. What is most alarming is that the actual number of heavy weapons is likely much higher, but combined Russian-separatist forces continue to deny monitors access to territory under their control. In a recent incident in territory under Russian-separatist control, an armed fighter demanded in a “threatening and hostile” manner that the SMM leave the area.

SMM reports shed light on the sophisticated supply chain that Russia uses to arm combined Russian-separatist forces in eastern Ukraine, despite concerted efforts to cover it up. On

February 28, separatists in Luhansk blocked monitors from accessing part of the border under their control in Izvaryne. When they later accessed the site, the SMM observed a convoy of trucks marked as so-called “humanitarian aid” accompanied by a car with a driver in military-style uniform. The same day, the OSCE Observer Mission saw a funerary transport marked by a sign indicating a Russian military casualty was on board enter Russia at the Gukovo border crossing. We join the European Union in affirming Russia’s responsibility, as a party to the conflict, to cut off its military, financial, and political support for the separatists, and withdraw its weapons and forces as it pledged to do in the Minsk agreements. We again call on all forces to uphold their agreement made in the Trilateral Contact Group on February 15, and provide the SMM with complete weapons inventories, without which a verified withdrawal is impossible.

Russia’s occupation of Crimea is yet another aspect of its aggression against Ukraine. Our Crimea-related sanctions will remain in place until Russia ends its occupation and attempted annexation of Crimea and returns control of this territory to Ukraine. We join our European and other partners in restating that our sanctions against Russia for its aggression in eastern Ukraine will remain until Russia fully implements its commitments in the Minsk agreements. We again call on Russia to observe the Helsinki Final Act, in which all participating States acknowledged that one another’s frontiers are inviolable and committed to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each participating State.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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