



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 Byrnes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
April 30, 2015

This past week has brought worrying news of violence in eastern Ukraine, which the Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) reports is at levels of intensity not seen since February.

The SMM has also reported on its efforts to negotiate a local ceasefire in Shyrokyne, and to have the sides disengage and pull back from the conflict line in an area where opposing forces are separated by as little as 100 meters in some places. We commend the SMM for these efforts, which are carried out under difficult circumstances but are nonetheless necessary if we are to see a peaceful resolution to the crisis.

Unfortunately, the SMM has also reported that Russia-backed separatists have repeatedly denied monitors access to the eastern part of Shyrokyne. The SMM reported April 28 that it obtained some access to parts of Shyrokyne that had previously been refused, but this access was limited and granted only after lengthy negotiations between the SMM and the separatists. We echo Deputy Chief Monitor Hug's public statement in which he said that these access restrictions constitute an unacceptable interference with the SMM's mandate.

We call on all sides to allow the SMM safe and unfettered access to carry out its mandate. We again call on Russia and the separatists it backs to allow the SMM to patrol throughout the territory they control, including along the Ukrainian-Russian border. We also call on Ukrainian forces to allow the SMM unfettered access to the territory under their control. It is plain to see that Ukrainian military personnel stopping monitors temporarily and asking them for identification is not comparable to the widespread restrictions the Russia-backed separatists have imposed on the SMM.

Russia-backed separatists continue to thwart the operations of the SMM by denying access to areas where monitors are needed most. SMM UAVs have documented a buildup of forces in separatist-controlled areas, including the presence of tanks and other equipment in and around Donetsk, Shyrokyne, and other hotspots. The documentation provided by SMM UAVs confirms that Russia continues to undermine the Minsk agreements by supplying lethal weapons to the separatists. SMM reporting continues to register attacks launched by Russia-backed separatists into territory well beyond the ceasefire line. Russia also continues to provide training, and command and control support for separatists in eastern Ukraine.

The actions taken by Russia and the separatists stand in stark contrast to those of the Government of Ukraine, which has taken concrete steps to implement its Minsk commitments and carry out reforms that point all of Ukraine towards prosperity and stability. Ukraine has adopted legislation to fight corruption, stood up a National Anti-Corruption Bureau, reformed its energy sector, and is moving forward with critical constitutional reform. We understand that the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) is prepared to deploy a mission to observe local elections in eastern Ukraine, as called for in the Minsk Package of Measures. While ODIHR has been invited by the Ukrainian government to carry out a pre-assessment and election monitoring mission, ODIHR is still waiting for the separatists to guarantee a secure environment and access to the locations it needs to visit to prepare for election monitoring.

We welcome the OSCE Troika Ministers' meeting on April 28, during which the foreign ministers of Serbia, Switzerland, and Germany expressed full support for Ambassador Heidi Tagliavini's efforts as head of the Trilateral Contact Group. We also support the Troika's call for the immediate establishment of working groups as provided for in the February 12 Package of Measures. We commend the Chairman-in-Office for appointing the heads of the four working groups, and urge them to start work right away.

While this is a positive step toward fulfillment of the Minsk agreements, we must remind Russia and the separatists it supports that they cannot pick and choose the portions of Minsk they wish to uphold. They cannot send representatives to the working groups to discuss political modalities while ignoring their other commitments, such as putting in place a genuine ceasefire and the verifiable withdrawal of heavy weapons. Furthermore, Russia must halt the flow of fighters and equipment from Russia into Ukraine, and end the training of the separatists. We call on Russia to allow thorough inspections of the so-called "humanitarian" convoys, which continue to enter Ukraine uninspected. Russia must also release all Ukrainian hostages held inside Russia, including Nadiya Savchenko and Oleg Sentsov.

Regarding Russian-occupied Crimea, we are troubled by continuing reports of harassment and interrogation of members of the Crimean Tatar community. We are also very concerned by media reports that Euromaidan activist Alexander Kostenko has been tortured in a Sevastopol jail, where he has been held for over a year. We call on Russian occupation authorities to swiftly and transparently investigate these allegations.

Fundamentally, Russia must cease its efforts to destabilize Ukraine and respect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Russia must end its occupation of Crimea, which remains an integral part of Ukraine.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.