



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 Permanent Council, Vienna
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It has now been 76 days since the Russian Federation began its military actions in Crimea, and 59 days since Russia's lawmakers voted to annex Crimea, all in blatant violation of international law. I know I have reminded the Council of these dates before. They mark only two days out of many when the Russian Federation has broken its OSCE commitments with respect to Ukraine over the past two and a half months. We must not lose sight of Russia's continued and flagrant disrespect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine.

Russia's behavior undermines the fundamental pillars of international law. Through the illegal military intervention and subsequent occupation of Crimea, as well as its persistent, unusual troop movements along its border with Ukraine, its support for violent groups operating on Ukrainian territory, and its propaganda campaign that perpetually distorts and often even completely ignores reality, Russia is cultivating an environment of fear, distrust, and insecurity. This undermines not only our common OSCE commitments, but also Russia's credibility as an international actor. It challenges the credibility of Russia's stated support for the chairmanship's recently proposed ideas on implementation of Geneva and the credibility of Russia's signature on the April 17 joint statement in Geneva. Russia committed to de-escalate tensions, to facilitate the disarmament of pro-Russia separatists, and facilitate an end to the occupation of government buildings. We call on Russia to do so immediately.

In stark contrast to Russia's ongoing destabilizing behavior, the government of Ukraine has worked tirelessly to implement its commitments and to stabilize the security situation. We applaud the government of Ukraine's decision to hold the first round of the OSCE-supported national dialogue in the Verkhovna Rada yesterday, which continues and amplifies the process the Ukrainian government had already started. We welcome the appointment of Ambassador Wolfgang Ischinger, who will lend OSCE support for Ukraine's series of roundtables that were kicked off in Kyiv yesterday and will travel throughout the country, but with a special focus on the south and east.

The invitation of Ambassador Ischinger in coordination with the Chairman-in-Office is but the latest step taken by the government of Ukraine to implement its commitments under the Geneva Joint Statement. The burden is now on Russia to act.

The OSCE, like the Ukrainian government, has been working to stabilize eastern Ukraine. The United States commends the OSCE for its ongoing broad and deep commitment to peace, security, and stability in Ukraine. We just finished this morning discussing the great work of the Special Monitoring Mission, and I'd like to turn to a few of the other OSCE activities in Ukraine.

Earlier this week we received the report of the joint ODIHR/HCNM Human Rights Assessment Mission (HRAM). This mission highlighted many of the OSCE's greatest strengths. It deployed quickly. It assessed the situation objectively. It reported its findings comprehensively. The report itself provides a sobering and fact-based assessment of serious human rights abuses, violations and crimes in the period immediately after Yanukovich fled the country. These include murder, physical assaults, intimidation, and abductions, which were largely carried out by pro-Russian "self-defense" groups reinforced by Russian citizens transported into Ukraine from their homes in Russia on buses bearing Russian license plates. Journalists have been a favorite target of these groups, who know that the greatest threat they face is the truth. We commend ODIHR and the HCNM for their diligent efforts to bring the truth to light.

The HRAM report only covers the period through the first of April. In the intervening six weeks, the situation has not improved. The Representative on Freedom of the Media, Dunja Mijatovic, remains engaged in her tireless efforts to highlight the ongoing threat that media face in Ukraine from pro-Russian separatist groups in the east and south. Her press release last Friday presents a depressing litany of threats, coercion, and intimidation. Armed people in uniform seized the editorial office of the Provintsia newspaper in Kostyantynivka, just south of Slovyansk in Donetsk Oblast. Just a few kilometers down the road, in Kramatorsk, threats from separatists forced the closure of the Privat/Novosti newspaper. Sergei Garmash, editor of the pro-Ukrainian unity Ostrov news portal, was attacked and shot at near Donetsk. Nikolai Ryabchenko, who has provided fearless reporting of the abuses by pro-Russian activists, disappeared near Mariupol. And the list goes on.

The HRAM report also highlights the fact that the Ukrainian people will have hard work ahead of them as they work to build democratic institutions that are capable of delivering the kind of accountability that all Ukrainians want. We are saddened by the tragic events in Odesa on May 2 and Mariupol on May 9 that resulted in numerous deaths and injuries. We call for a thorough investigation of these incidents and for bringing those responsible to justice in a timely manner. We welcome the Ukrainian parliament's decision to create an ad hoc parliamentary committee to review the Odesa and Mariupol incidents, as well as any cases of killings of unarmed civilians in eastern and southern Ukraine.

As my colleague, the distinguished representative of Ukraine, informed us two weeks ago, the Chairman-in-Office's Special Representative on Combatting Anti-Semitism, Rabbi Andrew Baker, visited Ukraine last month to investigate charges of anti-Semitism there. The United States condemns anti-Semitic rhetoric and activity anywhere it occurs. We also condemn knowingly false allegations of anti-Semitism, especially when made as part of blatant political propaganda campaign. From the beginning of the crisis, Russian propaganda has been rife with allegations of anti-Semitism in Ukraine, dire warnings of a "fascist, neo-Nazi take-over" in Kyiv, and outrageous claims that Ukraine is on the vanguard of a neo-Nazi resurgence in Europe. None of this is true. For instance, Russian media reports claimed that

for the first time the Jewish community in Crimea was able to celebrate Passover. This is patently false, because Jews have freely celebrated Passover in Crimea for many, many years. We look forward to Rabbi Baker's report and hope it will be made available soon.

So, Mr. Chair, the OSCE is doing admirable work in providing the world with much-needed unbiased information based on observable facts in Ukraine. The United States strongly welcomes that work and supports its continuation. It is important to recall, however, that none of this work would be possible without the active leadership and support of the government of Ukraine. Its government leads the national dialogue effort. Its government invited Rabbi Baker to investigate instances of anti-Semitism. Its government welcomed the Human Rights Assessment Mission and gave them complete access to the country. It invited the SMM. Its government supports Dunja Mijatović and continues to urge her to shine a light on media freedom issues in Ukraine, even when she is critical of the government's activities. That is the mark of a government that is focused on improving its implementation of OSCE commitments in as transparent a way as possible. We commend the government of Ukraine for its exemplary cooperation with the OSCE. And we reiterate our call for the government of the Russian Federation to begin to implement its commitments to bring this crisis to an end.

In closing I'd just like to point out one poll that was released this week. There has been a lot of focus on this poll that polled a thousand people from across Ukraine. One of the questions that was asked and the one that has gotten the most headlines was whether the people felt more loyal to Europe or Russia, and I understand why that's interesting to headlines. But to me the most interesting part of this poll was that it had asked people in Ukraine whether they were optimistic about the future, and 80% of them said they were optimistic about the future. I think that is a sign of great hope and a reminder to all of us of the importance of the election on May 25 and the opportunity that it presents to the people of Ukraine to start to move forward together and to build that better stronger future as one.

Thank you.