



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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As President Obama said earlier this week, “What we have learned from our history is that basic principles of territorial integrity and sovereignty and freedom, the ability for people to make their own determinations about their country’s future is the cornerstone of the peace and security that we’ve seen in Europe over the last several decades. And that is threatened by Russian actions in Crimea, and now Russian activity in eastern Ukraine.”

Mr. Chairman, at the forefront of our minds and of great concern to all of us is that eight OSCE Special Monitoring Mission monitors and one Ukrainian interpreter were taken hostage last week in eastern Ukraine. OSCE monitors have suffered intimidation, violence, and detention, and the fact that they have been held hostage is completely unacceptable. As we stated last week, we call for the immediate and unconditional release of the hostages and for full respect of the SMM to carry out its mandate throughout Ukraine. We urge participating States to call publicly for the immediate release of the monitors, and we urge Russia, in particular, to use its influence with the pro-Russian militants to free the OSCE monitors and Russia to publicly denounce the use of OSCE observers as hostages.

Mr. Chair, the people of Ukraine have chosen their new president and the United States continues to stand with them as they seeks to build a more unified, secure, transparent, and prosperous future. The Ukrainian people deserve the commitment of the entire international community. After such a clear election result, Russia has an opportunity to work together with Ukraine’s leadership, initiate dialogue, and reduce the tensions that have caused such destabilization and human suffering inside Ukraine.

To contribute to reducing tensions, Russia should control its border with Ukraine and stop Russian fighters and arms from crossing into Ukraine, of which there is ample evidence in the media. We have seen videos and media reports of armed militants, appearing to be heavily armed and professionally trained in combat operations, admitting that they came from Russia. Last week, Ukraine’s Border Guards seized 13 militants and dozens of weapons making an illegal border crossing into Luhansk. We also note that the so-called “Vostok Battalion,” a heavily armed group of militants from southern Russia, took over the administration building in Donetsk from pro-Russia separatists. Russia should also use its influence with pro-Russian separatists to de-escalate by returning control over such seized buildings to the lawful Ukrainian authorities. Instead, earlier this week, media outlets reported that hundreds of pro-Russian separatists, using machine guns and grenade launchers, attacked a border post garrison in Luhansk. Reports also stated that these separatists were blocking civilians from leaving their residences and were shooting from their premises.

We would welcome a complete, comprehensive, and verifiable withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine's border. We understand that over two-thirds of the troops have now pulled back from the border. Nevertheless, we continue to observe Russian troop activity in the vicinity of the border. Several thousand troops still remain in the vicinity and some units appear to be able to conduct operations at short notice. The United States will continue to support Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and will condemn any acts of aggression along or within its borders.

We do not and will never recognize Russia's illegal attempt to annex Crimea. We call on Russia to end its occupation of Crimea, which is and will remain a part of Ukraine.

Mr. Chair, I have a lot of additional material, but I'd like to close by quoting President Obama, who celebrated Freedom Day on Castle Square in Warsaw yesterday, and I'd like to share some of his words here today:

"Our democracies must be defined not by what or who we're against, but by a politics of inclusion and tolerance that welcomes all our citizens. Our economies must deliver a broader prosperity that creates more opportunity -- across Europe and across the world -- especially for young people. Leaders must uphold the public trust and stand against corruption, not steal from the pockets of their own people. Our societies must embrace a greater justice that recognizes the inherent dignity of every human being. And as we've been reminded by Russia's aggression in Ukraine, our free nations cannot be complacent in pursuit of the vision we share -- a Europe that is whole and free and at peace. We have to work for that. We have to stand with those who seek freedom.

"As free peoples, we join together, not simply to safeguard our own security but to advance the freedom of others. Today we affirm the principles for which we stand.

"We stand together because we believe that people and nations have the right to determine their own destiny. And that includes the people of Ukraine. Robbed by a corrupt regime, Ukrainians demanded a government that served them. Beaten and bloodied, they refused to yield. Threatened and harassed, they lined up to vote; they elected a new President in a free election -- because a leader's legitimacy can only come from the consent of the people.

"Ukrainians have now embarked on the hard road of reform. I met with President-elect Poroshenko this morning, and I told him that, just as free nations offered support and assistance to Poland in your transition to democracy, we stand with Ukrainians now.

"Ukraine must be free to choose its own future for itself and by itself. We reject the zero-sum thinking of the past -- a free and independent Ukraine needs strong ties and growing trade with Europe and Russia and the United States and the rest of the world. Because the people of Ukraine are reaching out for the same freedom and opportunities and progress that we celebrate here today -- and they deserve them, too.

"We stand together because we believe that upholding peace and security is the responsibility of every nation. The days of empire and spheres of influence are over. Bigger nations must not be allowed to bully the small, or impose their will at the barrel of a gun or with masked men taking over buildings. And the stroke of a pen can never legitimize the theft of a neighbor's land. So we will not accept Russia's occupation of Crimea or its violation of Ukraine's sovereignty. Our free nations will stand united so that further Russian provocations will only mean more isolation and costs for Russia. Because after investing so much blood and treasure to bring Europe together, how can we allow the dark tactics of the 20th century to define this new century?"

Thank you, Mr. Chair.