



## United States Mission to the OSCE

### **Response to the Update by the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine and in the Trilateral Contact Group, Ambassador Grau and Report by the Chief Monitor of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, Ambassador Cevik**

As delivered by Ambassador James S. Gilmore III  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
October 8, 2020

Ambassadors Grau and Cevik, it is always a pleasure to welcome you back to the Permanent Council. You should never forget that this Organization is behind you in the work that you do every day. We follow your efforts to facilitate a peaceful resolution of the conflict very closely here at the Permanent Council. You have our strongest support amid the constant and ever-changing challenges that you face every day. Your team members, working to improve conditions in eastern Ukraine, are doing so frankly at great risk to their own health and safety, as they face additional dangers from new things like from raging wildfires and of course of the ongoing exploding ordnance issues.

The crisis, today, underscores the need for the humanitarian and security measures that have been discussed again and again in the Minsk agreements, at last year's Normandy Summit, and every month at the *Trilateral Contact Group*. Instead, we see lip-service and then obstructionism from Russia and its proxies, which means limited progress on goals like de-mining for example. The residents of eastern Ukraine are again paying the price.

Ambassador Cevik, we were aware of the challenges you face within this conflict situation, we are very proud of the work that you do, we recognize the dangers that you face with CoViD19 and that of your staff members and, as you noted in your report, there's been comparatively less fighting over the past few months, which is helpful. Reports confirm daily ceasefire violations are significantly lower; 97 percent lower, in fact, when compared with the previous reporting period. We acknowledge there is still more to be done, and even one violation is one too many. The Special Monitoring Mission's ability to move about *per its mandate* is still impeded by Russia and its proxies. We note that in the days ahead, as there continue to be developments all through this region, that there will be challenges ahead for you and we support your efforts to maintain this ceasefire.

Ambassador Grau, we are grateful for your frank report today. As you pointed out this is a unique chance for peace and we recognize your report. Unfortunately, there are still deadlocks in the meetings with the *Trilateral Contact Group*. We are grateful for your progress and we are hopeful for concrete deliverables in the *Trilateral Contact Group*. Ambassador Grau, you have lived up to

the expectations that we place in you, when we named you to this work and this job. We are very grateful for your work and we ask you to continue your diligent work.

As I've said before, this is a tough job: forging agreements on demining, additional entry-exit crossing points, disengagement areas, and on mutual exchanges of detainees, this is all very difficult. I remind the listeners here today that the *Trilateral Contact Group*, which you chair and that you are working in, represents the OSCE, through you, Russia and Ukraine for the purpose of having the actual parties of this conflict in touch with each other to work out these challenges. Any effort to somehow divert attention to these people in eastern Ukraine is not constructive, whereas the work of the Trilateral Contact Group is constructive and we are very grateful for your work. Concrete progress is going to depend on political will, particularly Russia's, and whether the Kremlin will embrace a peaceful resolution to the conflict, rather than continue its obstruction, is the key issue, with respect to political will, that is the issue. When the attitude changes in Moscow they will make substantial progress. But in the meanwhile, civilians have too long borne the brunt of Russia's aggression in eastern Ukraine.

I remind everyone that the ceasefire, that is being implemented right now, was a precondition towards the further progress in the Minsk process. So now we have the ceasefire - more or less, more really - and now it's time to move to the next step in order to resolve this problem and remove it from the security challenges that we are facing today in Europe.

The United States, and the majority of the participating States, represented in this room are frustrated by Russia's efforts to stall progress within the *Trilateral Contact Group*. One such example is Russia's demand that Ukraine amend its July 15 Rada resolution on local elections. But the problem is that the Kremlin demands Kyiv revise its domestic legislation to meet Moscow's demands, and in the meanwhile they block efforts to improve humanitarian conditions in eastern Ukraine.

Russia should engage constructively in discussions at the *Trilateral Contact Group*, to alleviate the hardships of the civilian populations affected by this multi-year conflict. If that progress is made in the *Trilateral Contact Group* it will lead to security and peace within the European area.

Russia's continued occupation of Crimea must be raised, it is the key to the Kremlin's goal of undermining Ukraine's sovereignty, following its invasion of Crimea in violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity. Nearly 24,000 young Crimean residents have been conscripted into Russia's Armed Forces, which, as we have raised in the past, is inconsistent with international law, and is all part of Russia's efforts to militarize the peninsula. We demand Russia end its campaign of forced conscription of Crimean residents.

Russian occupation authorities continue to abuse Crimean Tatars and ethnic Ukrainians, restricting their freedom of expression and right to peaceful assembly. On a weekly basis, they are harassed or jailed, or worse, for daring to voice their opposition to Russia's occupation of Crimea or for exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief.

We are troubled by reports that Occupation authorities in Sevastopol conducted coordinated raids on at least 10 homes belonging to Jehovah's Witnesses on October 1. As a result, four men were arrested on charges of criminal "extremism" just for practicing their faith. This reflects very badly upon the attitude of Russia towards the people within Europe. It's an ongoing challenge.

We reiterate that people are entitled to the fundamental freedom of peaceful religious worship and call on Russia to cease its senseless campaign against the Jehovah's Witnesses, who are no danger or

harm to any occupation authorities or anyone else, end its systematic repression in Crimea, and release all Ukrainian political prisoners. This Crimean issue remains an open wound to the principles of security enshrined in the Helsinki Accords and the Final Act, of which we here have a responsibility to maintain.

Mr. Chair, the United States fully supports Ukraine's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, including its territorial waters. We do not, nor will we ever, recognize Russia's purported annexation of Crimea - by force. We join our European and other partners in affirming our Minsk-related sanctions against Russia will remain in place until Russia fully implements its Minsk commitments. The Crimea-related sanctions will remain in place until Russia returns full control of the peninsula back to Ukraine.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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