



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 Chargé d’Affaires, a.i. Harry R. Kamian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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The chart capturing ceasefire violations in eastern Ukraine throughout 2017 reveals a worrisome picture. The fluctuations throughout the year are readily apparent, as is the steep and unfortunate upward trend line leading up to today. Those who have survived more than three years of Moscow’s bloody conflict face ever-deteriorating conditions. Winter is upon us, and Russia’s willingness to exploit the vulnerabilities of critical civilian infrastructure by moving its forces closer to the Donetsk Water Filtration Station, and staging heavy caliber guns in densely populated areas, leaves the civilian population exposed to unconscionable danger.

The November 16 SMM weekly report noted a 20 percent increase in ceasefire violations in both Donetsk and Luhansk, compared with the previous week. On November 20 alone, the SMM recorded nearly 2,000 ceasefire violations, the highest number recorded in a 24-hour period for three months. Five hundred of these violations were discharges of Minsk-proscribed large caliber weapon systems. Ceasefire violations continue in the vicinity of the Donetsk Water Filtration Station where, on November 16 alone, the SMM recorded 211 violations.

Mr. Chair, we all know the truth: this is Russia’s conflict, but it is unwilling to make even simple moves to reduce tensions. Russia refuses to order the forces it arms, trains, leads and fights alongside to agree to the establishment of safety zones around critical infrastructure, or the withdrawal of forces in areas with dense civilian populations. For its part, as recently as last month, Kyiv has followed through on key political measures called for in the Minsk agreements, such as the extension of the law of special status. The calculated way Russia deploys its forces near infrastructure and along the contact line exacerbates the risk of environmental disaster and disruption of water supply to hundreds of thousands of people on both sides of the contact line. Mr. Chair, Russia’s actions also heighten the danger of civilian casualties from shelling.

The danger to civilians is real, and not just limited to falling shells. On November 16, the SMM separately reported three instances of fatalities caused by mines – two were civilians, and one was a Ukrainian police officer. The United States reiterates its call to the sides to fully implement their commitments on mine action as humanitarian, political, and security imperatives, and also as a necessary safeguard for SMM operations.

Mr. Chair, the United States is also dismayed that the sides have not exchanged a single detainee of the conflict in 2017. Even in the wake of Ukraine’s unilateral release of 15

detainees nearly a year ago, Russia's proxies repeatedly deny humanitarian organizations access to detainees on the Russia-controlled side of the line of contact. Hundreds of detainees continue waiting to be reunited with their families. We demand the sides treat detainees humanely, and call on Russia to respect the spirit of the Minsk agreements, and to authorize the exchange of detainees without delay.

Russia has detained dozens of Ukrainians on a variety of baseless pretexts. The United States is deeply concerned that a Moscow court may sentence journalist Roman Sushchenko to up to 20 years imprisonment on fabricated charges of espionage. We call on Russia to drop these charges. The United States is also following the cases of Mykola Karpiuk and Stanislav Klykh, who were convicted in May 2016 on bogus "terrorism" charges. We call on Russia to return both men to Ukraine.

The politically motivated targeting of Crimean Tatars, and others opposed to Russia's occupation of Crimea, continues unabated. On November 17, a Sevastopol City Court sentenced academic Dmytro Shtyblykov to five years imprisonment and a fine of 200,000 rubles on allegations of sabotage. Mr. Shtyblykov had been denied access to independent legal counsel for over a year, and human rights groups believe that the "confession" on which his conviction was based was likely coerced. We continue to receive alarming reports of Russian security forces in Crimea searching the homes of Crimean Tatar activists and, in some cases, of forcibly evicting them. For instance, there were reports of intimidating raids in the Crimean Tatar village of Pushkino on November 16, where security forces broke into houses, pointed guns at residents, and used physical force against them while conducting intrusive searches, allegedly for narcotics and other "contraband," none of which were found. Such abuses against the Crimean Tatar community must stop immediately.

Crimea is an integral part of Ukraine, within its internationally-recognized borders. We are alarmed by Russia's intentions to build barriers that would physically separate the occupied region from the rest of Ukraine. Russia's playbook of attempting to illegally annex or occupy territories is well-known, and in violation of international law. The United States calls on Russia to abide by its international commitments, including its OSCE commitments, and to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine.

Mr. Chair, despite its unsuccessful attempts to convince us of the contrary, and to distract us from the realities of the situation, it is clear that the Russian Federation has manufactured and sustained this conflict from the start. The brazen violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, along with the seizure and occupation of Crimea, remains Europe's twenty-first century example of the dangers of aggression. The United States calls upon Russia to end its campaign of repression in occupied Crimea, and return control of Crimea to Ukraine. The United States is resolute in its support for Ukraine's sovereignty, independence, unity, and territorial integrity within its internationally-recognized borders. We do not, nor will we ever, recognize Russia's purported annexation of Crimea. Crimea-related sanctions on Russia will remain in place until Russia returns full control of the peninsula to Ukraine. And the United States joins 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 under the Minsk agreements.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.