



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 Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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Since the Permanent Council last met, the level of violence in eastern Ukraine has only increased. With the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine reporting, on average, 600-800 violations per day, the situation on the ground can hardly be called a ceasefire. According to the SMM Chief Monitor, these are not short bursts of gunfire but rather sustained combat lasting several hours, involving heavy machine guns, grenade launchers, mortars, and heavy artillery. Combined Russian-separatist forces have not hesitated to make use of proscribed heavy weapons that should be far away from the contact line; this past weekend, they fired a volley of 20 grad rockets at Ukrainian government positions. On April 1, the SMM found a surface-to-air missile system on separatist-held territory contrary to the commitment in the Minsk agreements to withdraw all such weapons from that area. The presence of such heavy weapons increases the risk of a rapid re-escalation of the conflict. While the fighting has largely been concentrated in several hotspots in Donetsk, there have been recent signs that the fighting could spread to Luhansk, as sustained ceasefire violations were reported on April 1.

The way out of this growing crisis is clear. Demilitarizing the hotspots is an essential first step. The SMM has courageously dispatched what it calls mirror patrols on both sides of the contact line in an effort to reduce tensions. The pulling back of forces and demilitarizing hotspots must be fully monitored and verified by the SMM. Unfortunately, Russia-backed separatists continue to block the free movement of SMM monitors on a daily basis, in contravention of the SMM's mandate and the Minsk agreements. The United States joins other participating States in demanding an immediate end to the obstruction of OSCE monitors and to all threats against them. The SMM must have unrestricted access throughout Ukraine, including up to and along the Russia-Ukraine state border.

Mr. Chair, it is important that all agreements reached between the parties to the conflict be fully upheld. At the January 27 meeting of the Trilateral Contact Group, the parties pledged to open an additional crossing point at the line of contact in February. We understand the Russia-backed separatists have not held up their end of the agreement; we call on the parties to make this pledge to open an additional crossing point a reality for the sake of the Ukrainian people living in the conflict zone.

Colleagues, the Minsk agreements were designed not merely to end the conflict, but to restore Ukraine's governance over its sovereign territory. The decision taken by the self-proclaimed "Donetsk People's Republic" in March to issue passports has no legal basis in either the Minsk agreements or international law. The "DPR's" suggestion that these phony documents should be used for voter registration is spurious, and it underscores the need for an agreement

in the political working group on modalities for local elections in line with OSCE commitments and international law.

We join the European Union in recalling that the duration of sanctions is linked to the full implementation of the Minsk Agreements.

Mr. Chair, the human rights situation in Crimea remains of deep concern to the United States. Since Russia began its occupation of Crimea over two years ago, it has steadily rolled back the rights of the Ukrainian people and members of ethnic and religious minorities living on the peninsula. Voices that have expressed a view independent of Moscow have been forcibly silenced: TV station Chornomorska was taken off the air a year ago, and ATR, the region's only Tatar language broadcaster, was accused of "inciting extremism." We encourage delegations to join us at an event starting at 1 p.m. in the Ratsaal during which experts will provide further insight into the dire human rights situation in Crimea and the impunity for abuses. We repeat our call for Russia to uphold all of its international obligations and commitments and to end its occupation of Crimea immediately.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.