

**Introductory Remarks by
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**Special PC Meeting
05 April 2017**

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for attending this Special Permanent Council meeting on the crisis in and around Ukraine.

The Austrian Chairmanship has called this meeting because we are concerned about a number of developments.

Until the recent Easter truce, there were hundreds – sometimes thousands – of cease-fire violations every day.

Instead of a withdrawal of heavy weapons, there are daily reports of shelling in the security zone.

Instead of disengagement, there is confrontation – even in the disengagement areas.

Instead of enhanced connectivity, there is suspension of cargo traffic and a takeover of private assets.

Instead of building bridges, bridges are being destroyed.

The consequence: As the Chairman-in-Office Sebastian Kurz witnessed in early January, people in Eastern Ukraine suffer. More than 20 civilians have been

killed since the beginning of this year. People stand in line for hours to pass through check-points, or make their way across dangerous bridges. Houses are damaged. Civilians are caught in the cross-fire. As the Chairman-in-Office witnessed in early January, people in eastern Ukraine are living through the trauma of war. People are standing in line for hours to pass through check-points, or make their way with heavy bags across dangerous bridges. Houses are being damaged. Ordinary people are being killed or injured simply because of where they live.

And our own civilian monitors are being targeted like never before. Almost every day there are incidents of monitors being shot at, threatened, or denied access.

In the past few months, the political settlement process has been stalled. The situation has been complicated by unilateral actions and decrees that run counter to the spirit and letter of the Minsk agreements.

We need positive new dynamics.

What could this involve?

We commend and support the efforts of the Normandy Group, and to stabilize the situation and contribute to a peaceful solution. We believe that it is important to have a strong link between the political and operational responses to the crisis in and around Ukraine.

We also stand fully behind the work of the Trilateral Contact Group. I would like to take this opportunity to praise Ambassador Martin Sajdik for his efforts to broker agreements under difficult circumstances. We should put our full support behind him and the four Co-ordinators of the Working Groups to foster practical measures to improve the situation on the ground.

But the main responsibility lies with the parties. Frankly, we need to see signs of progress in the implementation of the Minsk Agreements.

Otherwise there is a risk of a dangerous, downward spiral.

The basis must be a durable cease-fire and the withdrawal of heavy weapons.

The cease-fire that went into effect on 1 April shows that it is possible to break the cycle of violence. But we need a sustainable peace, rather than just a temporary lull in the fighting.

To that end, let's use this meeting to identify steps that can be taken to de-escalate tensions:

1. We should discuss how to strengthen accountability and compliance so that the SMM can get back to monitoring a cease-fire rather than counting explosions.
Let's explore the establishment of a mechanism for the proper investigation of incidents threatening SMM monitors and damaging OSCE assets. All those who threaten or harm unarmed civilian OSCE monitors should be held accountable.
2. Let's push to increase the number of disengagement areas. There have been concrete proposals to that effect, so let's do this.
3. Let's reduce the risks of critical infrastructure coming under fire to prevent an ecological disaster.
4. Let's look for ways to better protect civilians in the conflict-affected regions and to alleviate the hardship of their daily lives. I am glad that Patrick Vial from ICRC has joined us. And I appreciate the cooperation that the OSCE has with the United Nations and civil society on this issue.
5. Let's increase the effectiveness of SMM. At the beginning of the year, Chairman-in-Office Sebastian Kurz said that he wanted to increase the number of monitors, enable them to monitor 24/7, and have sufficient technology. Thanks to a decision that you took here a few weeks ago, that should now be possible.

Therefore, it is urgent to roll-out the new technology and expand the Mission's footprint on the ground. We would also like to see the opening of more

forward patrol bases, particularly in the vicinity of the Ukrainian-Russian border.

But let us be clear. The SMM is a monitoring mission. The impetus for peace must come from the parties.

All those with an influence on the crisis must enhance their efforts to break the spiral of violence.

This meeting should send a strong political signal of support for the OSCE's work in Ukraine.

Ambassador Apakan, you have our full support and admiration. I hope that the outcome of our meeting today will give you, and all the dedicated mission members, the support you need to carry out the tasks that this Council has agreed to by consensus.

Today's meeting shows the OSCE is watching developments closely in the Donbas, and remains actively seized of the matter. Let us show that we are willing to work together to intensify efforts to reduce tensions and foster peace, stability and security.