



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Russian Federation on SMM reporting

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 19, 2015

In the spirit of dialogue I just want to respond to some of what our distinguished Russian colleague has said today. There was a conversation in this forum a few months ago about SMM reporting. One of the aspects of that conversation was to discuss the fact that because Russia and its proxies deny the SMM access to broad swathes of territory that is under their control, it makes the Ukrainian territory on the Russian-separatist controlled side of the line of contact a black box. We don't know how many Russian soldiers are there. We don't know how much Russian military equipment is there. We don't know where tanks might be, how close they are to the line of contact, how far they are. But because there is relatively free and open access on the Ukrainian government controlled side of the line, it makes it much easier to gather information on that side of the line. Now, that doesn't mean that information on one side of the line or the other is not interesting or important, it just means that we have to be very careful in drawing comparisons.

I think probably the wisest thing to do is to defer to the SMM in terms of using it as a comparison set, because really it's apples and oranges: it's comparing what the SMM can see in an area in which it has free and unfettered access, to what the SMM can see in what is effectively a black box, because it only has access to part of that area, and even then it's often restricted. And because of this apples and oranges situation, reading out a bunch of numbers as if they are comparable doesn't give an accurate view of what the truth is on the ground.

Again, we highly value the data that the SMM reports on either side of the line, but we think it needs to be seen in context in order to actually understand what is going on on the ground.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.