



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 Acting Deputy Political Counselor Andrew Shepard
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 23, 2021

Russia's ongoing aggression in eastern Ukraine and occupation of Crimea is now in its eighth year. It has claimed more than 13,000 lives, has wounded tens of thousands, displaced 1.6 million people, and continues to undermine regional security.

While the number of ceasefire violations recorded by the OSCE's Special Monitoring Mission are fewer than prior to the implementation of additional measures to strengthen the ceasefire – the number of Ukrainian soldiers killed or wounded each month is on the rise. As of September 22, 29 Ukrainian soldiers have been wounded and five killed this month alone. Indeed, this September could see the most casualties in one month's time since the additional measures significantly reduced violence and casualties. Reducing violence in this ongoing conflict is in the best interest of all parties. The United States calls on Russia to exercise the political will to ease human suffering and prevent further damage to the lives and livelihoods of all who live in these areas.

I thank the seven hundred-plus SMM monitors, who hail from 44 different OSCE participating States, including the United States and, I might add, Russia. I therefore implore Russia to cease obstructing SMM operations and allow the monitors, including those that are Russian nationals, to observe and report on the situation in eastern Ukraine. Yet Russia and the forces it controls continue to obstruct the work of the Special Monitoring Mission, a mission that Russia joined consensus to establish. Clearly, Russia's goal is to prevent the SMM from documenting the Russian forces, Russian equipment, Russian weapons, Russian convoys, and Russian fuel trucks on the other side of the Line of Contact. This has always been a Russia-led conflict. Russia initiated it and continues to be the aggressor. Only Russia is responsible for the death and devastation it has caused. The civilian population continues to bear the brunt. Russia's ongoing blockage of the entry-exit crossing points along the Line of Contact directly harms the most vulnerable people living in the Russia-controlled territory of Ukraine.

Russia continues its passportization campaign in eastern Ukraine. Russia has coerced hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian nationals on Ukrainian territory into obtaining Russian citizenship in violation of Ukrainian sovereignty. Russia even went so far as to transport these same individuals from the Donbas into Russia to vote in its recent Duma elections. Furthermore, Russia conducted its Duma elections in occupied Crimea, which is Ukraine's territory. We reaffirm our unwavering support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine.

In Crimea, Russia continues to punish Ukrainian citizens who have chosen not to accept Russian passports. Just last week, occupation authorities fined several Crimean Tatar leaders and other demonstrators, who were picked up for protesting the detention of Deputy Mejlis Chair Nariman Dzhelyal, for failing to have a Russian passport. We continue to follow the case of Dzhelyal and his co-defendants and call for their immediate release. We are disturbed that the charges against Dzhelyal's co-defendant Asan Akhmetov were made more severe after he recanted his coerced confession. Akhmetov was reportedly brutally tortured by Russia's internal security service during the initial days of his detention earlier this month. He now faces charges carrying up to 20 years imprisonment, five years longer than before.

Finally, I would like to reiterate, and will continue to reiterate weekly, the United States' support for Ukraine's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. We do not, nor will we ever, recognize Russia's purported annexation of Crimea. As a signatory to the joint declaration of the Crimea Platform, we reaffirm that Crimea is Ukraine.

We join our European and other partners in affirming that our eastern Ukraine-related sanctions against Russia will remain in place until Russia fully implements its Minsk commitments. Crimea-related sanctions will remain in place until Russia returns full control of the peninsula to Ukraine. We again call on Russia to fulfill its commitments under the Minsk agreements, including ceasing interference with, and harassment of, the SMM.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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