



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Address by the Chief Monitor of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, Ambassador Ertuğrul Apakan

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

At the outset, let me thank the Chairmanship for holding this special meeting of the Permanent Council to address the disturbing developments in Ukraine, and Ambassador Apakan for briefing us on the situation.

Ambassador Apakan, as you noted, conditions on the ground in eastern Ukraine are more volatile and unpredictable than before. Your characterization of the situation as a “violent stalemate” is apt considering the regular re-occurrence of ceasefire violations and the aggression directed toward the SMM.

In recent weeks, we have witnessed a disturbing pattern of targeted attacks on SMM personnel and property in separatist-controlled areas. Clearly, some groups hope to intimidate SMM monitors. On August 16, a separatist fighter at a checkpoint threw an unexploded 122mm artillery shell into an SMM vehicle. We join Foreign Minister Dačić in condemning the arson attack that destroyed four SMM vehicles in Donetsk city, and all other attempts to hamper the SMM’s valuable work in eastern Ukraine. I hope colleagues also took note of our distinguished Russian colleague’s comment today saying that “objective reporting” was “vital for monitors’ safety.” I hope that wasn’t a threat. We appreciate the steps taken to improve security, particularly around SMM offices and residences in separatist-controlled Donetsk city, which has been the site of some of the more egregious efforts to intimidate the SMM. These occur at the same time that SMM UAVs continue to experience severe – what you’ve called “military-grade” – jamming, which has led to their crashing. The SMM remains unable to access large swaths of separatist-controlled territory, including most of the area along Ukraine’s border with Russia.

Mr. Chair, since our last meeting, combined Russian-separatist forces have sharply escalated their attacks on Ukrainian positions across the ceasefire line at various locations along the line of contact. On any particular day in the past month, the Ukrainian government reports that its forces have sustained over 100 incidents of shelling or shooting in a 24-hour period, making this the most intense period for attacks by combined Russian-separatist forces since their February offense against Debaltseve – their original, immediate, massive violations of the Minsk Package of Measures. Many of these attacks occur at night, when the SMM is not patrolling, and are thus not recorded in SMM daily reports. For example, overnight on August 16 to 17, combined Russian-separatist forces intensified their shelling of Ukrainian held territory on the outskirts of Mariupol and other areas at the southern end of the line of contact. Combined Russian-separatist forces shelled Lebedynsky, Hnutove, and Sartana, all of which are populated, resulting in deaths and injuries among the local population and damage to gas, electricity and water infrastructure. Combined Russian-separatist forces also

shelled Ukrainian positions around the now depopulated town of Shyrokyne. Ukrainian forces deployed heavy weapons for defensive retaliatory strikes.

While many of the attacks by combined Russian-separatist forces occurred at times that the SMM was not able to witness and report on them, the SMM has seen the aftermath of such attacks and reported on the presence of craters, damage to infrastructure, and unexploded ordnance in numerous locations.

At the same time that combined Russian-separatist forces increase their attacks on Ukrainian positions, Russian political leaders and media attempt to fool and dissemble by raising alarm about a so-called “impending Ukrainian offensive.” Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov did so during an August 17 press conference, when he claimed that Ukrainian actions “look like preparation for an offensive.” Colleagues, let’s be clear: there is a victim and an aggressor here. And Russia’s aggression against Ukraine continues unabated in an attempt to use violence to control Ukraine and to deprive people living in Ukraine of a stronger future. Our Russian colleague’s statement today that “another armed provocation by Ukraine looked just like last August” is laughable and outrageous: last August is when Russian forces invaded Ukraine, causing the tragedy at Ilovaysk.

Similarly, Russian state television criticized what it claimed was the shelling by Ukrainian forces of Donetsk and Horlivka, while failing to mention the regular attacks by combined Russian-separatist forces on Ukrainian positions.

We hope Russia will walk back this ongoing escalation. We reiterate our call for Russia and the separatists it backs to resolve the conflict in eastern Ukraine, not on the battlefield, but at the negotiating table in the Trilateral Contact Group format Russia agreed to when it signed the Minsk agreements in September 2014 and later in February 2015. We call upon Russia and the separatists to engage in discussions in the Trilateral Working Group’s working groups in good faith, and with an aim to finding a peaceful resolution to the fighting in eastern Ukraine.

Mr. Chair, Ambassador Apakan, in the Permanent Council we regularly hear our distinguished Russian colleagues present a very different story. They blame Ukraine for the conflict, they pay lip service to the Minsk agreements, and call for peace. It is essential that we remember the context in which they speak: Ukraine did not send arms, materiel, and fighters into its neighbor’s sovereign territory, or violently seize hundreds of square kilometers of the territory beyond the contact line agreed to at Minsk. That was the work of combined Russian-separatist forces. Indeed, without Russia providing tanks, armored vehicles, heavy artillery, and military personnel, training, and elements of command and control to the separatists, there would be no fighting in eastern Ukraine. Time and time again, Russia talks of peace but refuses to implement its Minsk commitments that would make peace possible. If Russia truly wants peace, it must act, not just talk. If Russia truly wants peace, it must halt its use of heavy weaponry, withdraw its soldiers from Ukrainian territory, and fully implement its Minsk commitments.

Finally, let me underscore that the United States does not recognize Russia’s attempted annexation of Crimea, which remains part of Ukraine, and we call on Russia to end its occupation of the peninsula.

Mr. Chair, Ambassador Apakan, before closing I’d like to share with you that I had the opportunity during this recess to travel to eastern Ukraine, to the cities of Kramatorsk and Slovyansk that had been liberated from Russian-separatist forces. And what I found on that

visit was wholly consistent with what Ambassador Apakan said today, which is that the people living in Ukraine want peace. And that they believe that with peace they can solve all other problems. The visit to Slovyansk and Kramatorsk was such a remarkable study in contrast: because while we sat in a room that had bullet holes in the walls, and while we passed a bombed-out bridge, what we met were people who are hopeful about the future, who embraced peace, who are grateful to be living in government-controlled territory. We talked with IDPs who had escaped separatist-controlled territory, who had families still there who they were concerned about, and people from either side of the line of contact were completely united in wanting one thing, which was peace. This is what we found when we stopped at a youth center, when we showed up at a soccer pitch, or when we visited a home for IDPs.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.