



United States Mission to the OSCE

Illegal “Elections” in Donbas

As delivered by Chargé d’Affaires Harry Kamian
to the Special Permanent Council, Vienna
November 12, 2018

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The United States joins with the European Union, the members of the G7, and the clear majority of participating States in condemning the illegal so-called “elections” held November 11 in Russia-controlled eastern Ukraine. Russia’s continued effort to institutionalize and legitimize Russia’s puppet “People’s Republics” would be a laughable farce if they were not also a major obstacle to implementing the Minsk agreements. These are nothing more than Russia’s proxy authorities, and no amount of fake elections or trappings of statehood will confer legitimacy on them. It was Russia’s efforts to institutionalize these proxies back in 2014 that blocked Minsk implementation. As a reminder, in September 2014 Ukraine passed special status and amnesty and had called for real local elections in Donbas as part of the Minsk Agreements to occur in December – only to have Russia preempt them with illegitimate “elections” this November. We did not accept it the last time Russia organized sham elections, and we won’t accept it now. The “People’s Republics” are illegal and have no place in the Minsk agreements, and they should be disbanded.

These sham procedures demonstrate Russia’s failure to constructively engage in the established peace process and are violations of Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. We are concerned these illegal, irresponsible actions will lead to an escalation of violence in this conflict that Russia instigated in 2014. The United States calls on Russia to disavow the results of these illegal “elections,” as well as to implement an immediate ceasefire, disengage and withdraw its forces from the line of contact, and carry out the cantonment of its proscribed weapon systems in line with the Minsk agreements. Russia must take steps to prevent this situation from spinning out of control.

As stated by many voices in this Council—including the Italian Chairman-in-Office and the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine and in the Trilateral Contact Group, Ambassador Martin Sajdik—Moscow’s actions contravened the letter and the spirit of the Minsk agreements. The agreements state that the OSCE is to monitor the elections, which are to be held in accordance with Ukrainian law and OSCE/ODIHR standards. Yesterday’s sham elections satisfied none of these conditions. Instead, it was yet another attempt by Moscow to legitimize its proxies in Russia-controlled Donbas.

Russia’s actions have fooled no one. Russia retains full control over the areas of the Donbas affected by the conflict. The local population remains voiceless and unable to exercise its

human rights and fundamental freedoms. The so-called “Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics” are inseparable from the illegal armed groups controlled by Moscow and have no basis in Ukrainian law.

Mr. Chair, Russia’s violations of Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity are growing at an alarming rate. These actions have created Europe’s largest humanitarian crisis in a generation, with 3.4 million Ukrainians requiring assistance and over 1.5 million internally displaced. The humanitarian crisis will continue until a true and lasting ceasefire is implemented and basic commitments under the Minsk agreements are met. Rather than taking steps to achieve these goals, Russia is exacerbating and prolonging the crisis with its illegal actions.

The United States fully supports 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. We join our European and other partners in affirming that our Minsk-related sanctions against Russia will remain in place until Russia fully implements its Minsk commitments. The separate, Crimea-related sanctions will remain in place until Russia returns full control of the peninsula to Ukraine.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.