



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Project Coordinator in Ukraine, Ambassador Vaidotas Verba

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Michele Siders
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 21, 2018

Ambassador Verba, the United States warmly welcomes you back to the Permanent Council and thanks you for your thorough report. We also appreciate the insightful briefing on the work of the Project Coordinator in Ukraine (PCU) and welcome the extension of the PCU's mandate.

Over four years ago, the Ukrainian people reaffirmed their clear choice for democracy, reform, and European integration. Since then, Ukraine has made significant progress in implementing wide-ranging political, economic, and social reforms. Most notable among them are steps taken by the government to stabilize the macroeconomic environment, and measures to combat corruption and enhance public sector accountability. Ambassador Verba, the help that your team has given to Ukraine's authorities to decentralize election oversight, establish an anti-corruption court, and assist the Constitutional Court in addressing direct citizen complaints, has been essential. The fact that Ukraine and its people must still surmount obstacles on the path to reform underscores the imperative of your mission's focus on this line of effort.

Ukraine has made these advances despite Russia's ongoing aggression in the Donbas and its attempted annexation of Crimea. The costs of this conflict are all too real. To date, over 10,000 people have lost their lives. Local populations in the affected regions face ongoing hardship due to a lack of economic opportunities, damaged and destroyed infrastructure, and dangerous mines and unexploded ordnance. Over 25,000 have been wounded in the conflict, while Ukraine must care for nearly 1.5 million internally displaced persons. Those in Crimea who question or speak out against Russian occupation face harassment, show trials, and often imprisonment.

Ambassador Verba, despite the PCU's limited resources, your mission fills an important role in helping Ukraine manage the consequences of this conflict. The United States is proud to have supported your initiative to help the Ukrainian government enhance its capacity in humanitarian demining – a capacity that, tragically, it will need for many years after the conflict ultimately comes to an end. We recall that last year, we expressed our hope that the Rada would pass the draft mine action policy framework, which the Ukrainian government

authored with expert advice from the PCU. We urge the Rada to take action on this legislation.

Ambassador Verba, as you are well aware, Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine has put critical infrastructure across the conflict area at risk. Chlorine canisters in the Donetsk Filtration Station and phenyl plants near the contact line are but two of the dangers that could quickly develop into a major humanitarian and environmental disaster. In this regard, the PCU's projects on chemical safety and security are essential. We once again commend your personal initiative to implement them. Specifically, your project on local emergency response to a chemical disaster is not merely important, it is imperative, and the United States was pleased to fund it. This past year has been marked by a number of close calls in which the Donetsk Filtration Station's chlorine canisters were nearly ruptured by incoming shells. Tens of thousands of people could be poisoned if this were to happen. In addition, clean water would be cut off for hundreds of thousands more. The United States urges you and the OSCE executive structures to make this project your highest priority, and to initiate it immediately. We also encourage further financial contributions from other participating States in support of this effort.

Finally, Ambassador Verba, we appreciate the PCU's efforts in the National Dialogue to bring people together on issues of common concern in Ukraine. We understand that you are exploring ways to empower the Ukrainian government to organize dialogues with its constituents on issues of key concern, including education of members of national minorities and assistance to displaced persons. This is important work, and we encourage you to continue pursuing it.

In conclusion Mr. Ambassador, we reiterate that the mandate of the Project Coordinator in Ukraine applies to the entirety of Ukraine within its internationally-recognized borders, including Crimea. Thank you once again, Ambassador Verba, for your four years of dedicated and valuable service to the OSCE and to the people of Ukraine at such a critical time.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.