



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 Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 23, 2016

The United States strongly condemns the attack that occurred yesterday on the government-controlled town of Vodian, where mortar fire hit the town while SMM monitors were carrying out a patrol. The attack put civilians and SMM monitors at grave risk. This violation of the Minsk agreements is completely unacceptable, and those responsible must be held accountable.

As this incident shows, combined Russian-separatist forces continue to pursue a policy of provocation that undermines the prospects for genuine disengagement, a lasting ceasefire, and, ultimately, the full implementation of the Minsk agreements. They continue to advance across the contact line in violation of the Minsk agreements. Most recently, combined Russian-separatist forces established new positions at Stanytsia Luhanska, similar to their advance across the contact line near Kominternove in December 2015. The SMM continues to help recover the remains of separatist fighters killed in Ukrainian government-controlled areas, most recently on June 20 when the SMM helped recover the bodies of two separatists near Zaitseve.

Russia-backed separatists also continue to launch provocative attacks from residential areas in an attempt to discredit Ukrainian forces. As the SMM noted in its June 16 weekly report, separatists in Donetsk “continue to place civilians in danger by continuing to use residential areas for their firing position and thus attracting fire.” Shortly after that report, on June 17, the SMM found surface-to-air missiles only 450 meters away from a home in Donetsk City, which had previously been hit with return fire from Ukrainian forces. In separatist-held Dokuchaivsk, a resident told the SMM he had heard shells being launched near his house before Ukrainian forces fired back; the SMM found tracks of a towed howitzer in the area. We recall that in May, residents of Donetsk City told monitors that separatist fighters fired mortars from residential rooftops and then withdrew. Combined Russian-separatist forces, like all combatants, have an obligation under international humanitarian law to distinguish between combatants and civilians and to protect civilians from harm through the tactics they employ. We again call on Russia to press the separatists it supports and fights alongside to immediately stop launching provocations and attacks from civilian areas.

Combined Russian-separatist forces continue to block SMM access to try to conceal their actions from the international community. On June 14, the SMM photographed two R-330ZH Zhytel mobile jamming stations south of separatist-held Donetsk City. These sophisticated jamming systems are Russian-made and operated only by Russian forces. They are not in Ukraine’s arsenal. Three days later, the SMM’s only remaining long-range UAV came under

intense jamming while flying along the line of contact near Donetsk and crashed. We strongly condemn all efforts to blind the SMM, which serves as the eyes and ears of the international community.

A comprehensive ceasefire is the first component of the Minsk agreements. In order for local elections to be held under Ukrainian law, in accordance with OSCE standards, and monitored by ODIHR, as stipulated in the Minsk Package of Measures, they must be held in a safe and secure environment. ODIHR can only deploy election observers after a comprehensive ceasefire is in place. The coordinators of the economic and humanitarian working groups have said that a real and lasting ceasefire is essential to their ability to ease the humanitarian and economic crisis in eastern Ukraine; a crisis that was caused by Russian aggression.

The United States welcomes the June 15 agreement on the principles of disengagement reached in Minsk with the assistance of the Normandy format National Security Advisors. Since 95 percent of ceasefire violations have been concentrated in just five hotspots along the contact line, the full implementation of a robust disengagement plan could result in a sustainable ceasefire and help ease the suffering of the Ukrainian citizens living in the conflict zone. We encourage the sides to identify specific disengagement zones and swiftly implement the agreement.

We join the European Union in reiterating that the duration of the sanctions is linked to the full implementation of the Minsk agreements. Sanctions imposed for Russia's aggression in eastern Ukraine should remain in place until Russia fully implements its Minsk commitments, including the withdrawal of foreign forces and equipment and the return to Ukraine of full control over its international border. Let's be clear: no-one wants sanctions. And all of us should regret that they are still necessary. Sanctions are not anti-Russian; they are meant to encourage Russia to live up to its commitments to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of its neighbors.

Our separate Crimea-related sanctions related to Moscow's occupation of Crimea will also remain in force until the occupation ends and Russia returns the peninsula to Ukraine.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.