



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
September 10, 2015

We welcome the September 1 ceasefire which appears to be largely holding and has resulted in a marked decrease in violence in eastern Ukraine. We note, however, that there have been attacks by combined Russian-separatist forces across the line of contact that resulted in Ukrainian casualties. We need to seize this moment while the ceasefire is largely intact. The U.S. supports efforts to finalize the proposed supplemental agreement on withdrawal of heavy weapons below 100mm in caliber, and we continue to urge Russia and the separatists to fully implement their Minsk commitments, including the withdrawal of Russian foreign fighters and weapons.

The Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) has been a critical component in facilitating implementation of the Minsk agreements, and its role in supporting and monitoring this latest ceasefire is no less important.

The SMM should conduct more patrols on both sides of the line of contact in areas where the ceasefire is holding, in order to build confidence and pave the way for further de-escalatory steps. The SMM should also have a greater presence in hotspots to help build confidence in and the durability of the ceasefire, and thereby preempt the outbreak of fighting. Establishing fixed positions at a number of specific locations, as called for by Ukraine and Russia, would be ideal, but would strain SMM resources. However, as a test case, we should consider the SMM's establishing fixed positions at two locations on a temporary basis. Furthermore, the SMM should continue to press for access to the massive areas where Russia-led separatist forces have blocked SMM access, creating a black hole over many months. Russia and the separatists need to give the SMM unfettered access to the territory they control and to the Russian-Ukrainian border, as they committed to do under Minsk. They should provide this access immediately and completely.

Mr. Chair, colleagues, we must make sure the SMM has the means to fulfill its mandate. The SMM currently has 520 monitors, which is well short of Chief Monitor Apakan's immediate goal of 600 monitors. We should see it as an urgent priority to furnish the SMM with the personnel it needs to fulfill its mandate. The United States is taking immediate steps to bring the total number of U.S.-seconded monitors up to 60, ten percent of the goal of 600. We call upon participating States to increase the number of monitors they provide to the SMM.

Putting more monitors on the ground is necessary to help consolidate and sustain the ceasefire, which in turn will help the diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict.

Mr. Chair, colleagues, while the current ceasefire is heartening despite its imperfections, the United States remains deeply concerned about the increasingly serious humanitarian predicament faced by the people living in separatist-controlled areas. SMM reports make it plain that residents in Donetsk city requested support from the so-called “Donetsk People’s Republic” for the repair of their damaged houses, but were told they would receive help only when “the conflict was over.” These people are not alone. The UN Office of the Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs estimates that two million people living in the conflict affected areas are in urgent need of aid. Last week, I spoke of the fact that international organizations and humanitarian NGOs had assembled 300 trucks full of emergency shelter, food, and medical supplies. According to the UN, these trucks were supposed to have delivered their supplies by the end of August for this aid to reach those who needed it. While, according to UNHCR, one convoy was able to reach Russian-separatist-controlled territory last month, additional and desperately-needed supplies continue to sit in warehouses, blocked by Russian-separatist forces.

The Ukrainian government has taken steps to help by facilitating the work of international aid agencies. We encourage the Ukrainian government to continue its efforts in this regard. It has established “humanitarian and logistical centers” near the line of contact to give citizens living in separatist-controlled areas much-needed access to food, medicine, and banking services. The SMM visited one of these centers near Zaitseve that is already serving more than 700 citizens daily, and can provide services to up to 5,000 a day. This willingness to assist people in need and address the humanitarian problem has not been matched by Russia or the separatists. We see distressing reports of humanitarian assistance organizations being expelled from separatist-controlled territory. And Russia continues to refuse to allow proper inspections of its so-called “humanitarian convoys” – or to deliver “aid” in line with international standards, as it agreed to in Minsk. So far 36 illegal white-truck convoys have crossed into eastern Ukraine.

Mr. Chair, colleagues, we find ourselves at an important moment. Russia once again has an opportunity to reverse course, and to live up to its commitments as a signatory to Minsk and create a lasting peace in Ukraine, rather than continuing its aggression, ignoring Ukrainian sovereignty and international law. We must seize the momentum generated by the ceasefire to implement Minsk fully. OSCE participating States need to provide the SMM with the support and resources it requires to fulfill its mandate. We must ensure that Russia and the separatists do not resume their high rate of attacks across the line of contact, that they allow the provision of humanitarian aid, and release all hostages. In short, it is a time for action.

Finally, Mr. Chair, the Permanent Council must not lose sight of the fact that Russia continues to occupy Crimea, which remains part of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. Russia’s flagrant violation of international law and disregard of OSCE principles and commitments must end. We remain deeply concerned about reports of human rights abuses against members of Crimea’s ethnic Tatar community, including ongoing prosecutions of Tatar leadership, raids this week on Tatar homes, the recent closure of a madrassah, and reports of at least three suspicious killings of Tatars in recent weeks.

Russia must end its occupation of Crimea now.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.