



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
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For the second week in a row, ceasefire violations in eastern Ukraine reached as many as three thousand incidents in a single day. That is on par with the high levels of violence in April and July. Combined Russian-separatist forces continue to be responsible for provoking the majority of attacks. In addition, the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine has repeatedly recorded the use and movement of multiple launch rocket systems on the contact line, including the transfer of one system toward separatist-held Luhansk city on November 9.

Civilians have borne a heavy cost of this violence, a cost that has only been exacerbated by the onset of winter weather. To safeguard the population, steps must be taken to improve the situation for those living in the conflict zone, including opening additional crossing points along the line of contact. Last week in the Trilateral Contact Group, the Ukrainian government restated its willingness to reopen the vehicle crossing at Zolote, and its military publicly reiterated the same this week. But Russia and the separatists continue to renege on their pledge made nearly a year ago in the Humanitarian Working Group to open this crossing point. Every participating State in this Council that has taken the floor on the conflict in and around Ukraine, save one, has expressed strong support for the re-opening of this crossing point, which would be a lifeline to the conflict-affected people of eastern Ukraine. We call on Russia to exercise its control over the separatists to open the Zolote crossing point as quickly as possible. And we stress, once again, the need for the Trilateral Contact Group to agree to protect critical infrastructure and respond to any potential chemical contamination resulting from combat.

Disengagement is still urgently needed. However, combined Russian-separatist forces continue to commit ceasefire violations in and around the Stanytsia Luhanska disengagement zone. The SMM observed evidence that combined Russian-separatists launched new attacks on Ukrainian positions on November 13. The SMM has also observed the installation of snipers' nests at separatist positions at Stanytsia Luhanska. Such provocative actions prevent disengagement, which all sides agreed can only begin after a seven-day ceasefire. By contrast, Ukrainian forces have demonstrated good faith in attempting to implement disengagement. Last week, Ukraine demined the part of the railway bridge at Stanytsia Luhanska under its control; SMM monitors were able to start traversing the bridge, only to be forced to stop halfway by the presence of mines on the side of the bridge under separatist control.

We remain gravely concerned over the build-up of combined Russian-separatist forces outside Mariupol. Combined Russian-separatist forces blocked SMM monitors from accessing two different areas northeast of Mariupol on November 14. Given that the SMM has observed a link between access restrictions and ceasefire violations, we are deeply concerned that combined Russian-separatist forces may be planning more attacks against Mariupol or its environs. Just two weeks ago, combined Russian-separatist forces launched an attack using multiple launch rocket systems on a suburb of Mariupol. We call on Russia and the separatists it backs to give OSCE monitors full and unfettered access to the area around Mariupol and immediately withdraw proscribed weapons.

Interference with the SMM's monitoring undermines prospects for a sustainable ceasefire and disengagement. The Joint Center for Control and Coordination should respond to any incidents of intimidation of monitors and ensure forces responsible are properly disciplined. Ukraine should follow up on a report of harassment of SMM monitors by seemingly intoxicated soldiers at the forward patrol base in Volnavakha. And Russia should respond to a much more serious incident last week, in which jeering men in a large truck blocked the escape route of monitors fleeing shelling in separatist-held Donetsk.

Mr. Chair, we hope that the Normandy Quartet will soon reach an agreement on a comprehensive roadmap to implement the Minsk Agreements, laying out a sequence of security and political steps for full implementation. To be consistent with OSCE standards and Ukrainian law, local elections in certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk must be held in a safe and secure environment. Elections cannot be held under the barrel of a gun. Attacks and other provocations by combined Russian-separatist forces undermine progress on the political aspects of Minsk.

Colleagues, the persecution of Crimean Tatars continues unabated in Russia-occupied Crimea. Crimean Tatar activist Nedim Khalilov, who filed a civil suit calling for Russia's occupation of Crimea to be declared illegal, was reportedly deported to Russia on November 10. The threat of criminal charges and deportation in response to peaceful dissent has a chilling effect on the remaining members of the Crimean Tatar community, including those who seek to defend their rights.

On November 14, the United States joined the European Union in adding six persons to the Crimea-related sanctions list for supporting Russia's occupation and illegal annexation of Ukrainian Crimea. The six were illegitimately elected to represent Crimean in Russia's Duma, and are therefore complicit in policies that threaten the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine.

In closing, let me reiterate that Crimea-related sanctions will remain in place until Russia ends its occupation and attempted annexation of Crimea and returns control of this territory to Ukraine. We join our European and other partners in restating that our sanctions against Russia for its aggression in eastern Ukraine will remain until Russia fully implements its commitments in the Minsk agreements.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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