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United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to OSCE Chairperson-in-Office's Special Representative Heidi Tagliavini

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 20, 2014

The United States warmly welcomes Ambassador Tagliavini back to the Permanent Council.

Dear Thomas, as you said, Ambassador Tagliavini didn't hesitate for a moment and quickly packed her bags when asked. I have a sense that the challenges in the ensuing months may have made her wish that she had hesitated a little bit longer before jumping into the abyss, as it were. I don't think it would bring Heidi any comfort to know that the impression that we have is that whenever there is a difficult situation that calls for somebody of determination and principle, we will now think of calling on Heidi Tagliavini, which may not be good for you in the future either, because you have served so diligently and determinedly, with such even-handed grace in the position that you have undertaken on behalf of the Chairmanship, as well as on behalf of all of us.

We join others in applauding your unwavering commitment and tireless work to support a peaceful future for all of Ukraine. We thank you for providing clear assessments of the implementation of the Minsk Protocol and Memorandum, including at last week's briefing to the UN Security Council. Serving as a steward of the peace efforts, you have stressed the importance of following through on the implementation of all provisions of the Minsk Protocol and subsequent Memorandum during your regular consultations with the Russian Federation and with Ukraine, the other two participants in the Trilateral Contact Group.

The United States shares your assessment that both the Minsk Protocol and Memorandum are valid, binding upon all signatories, and must be implemented in good faith. Unfortunately, not all the signatories have done so.

Mr. Chair, the ceasefire in eastern Ukraine continues to be marred by Russia's disregard for the commitments it made in Minsk. While fighting temporarily diminished after the initial signing of the Minsk Protocol, the Russia-backed separatists used this lull to expand the area under their control. Moreover recent activities in the Donbas indicate a new military build-up in the area, threatening the fragility of the ceasefire. Russia has moved fighters and weapons across the border, and continues to enable separatist activities that violate the ceasefire and Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

We are also concerned that Russia continues to occupy Crimea, which remains part of Ukraine. De facto Russian authorities in Crimea commit serious abuses against members of religious and ethnic minorities and those who rightly criticize the illegality of the Russian presence in this part of Ukraine.

Colleagues, Ukraine has made clear through word and deed that it is committed to implementing the Minsk agreements and to pursuing national unity and peace. President Poroshenko has gone to great lengths to uphold the Ukrainian government's part of the agreement with Russia, and the separatists it backs, by taking positive steps to implement the twelve points of the Minsk Protocol. It is unacceptable that neither Russia nor the Russia-backed separatists have reciprocated Ukrainian efforts.

Mr. Chair, the Minsk agreements provide a roadmap to a peaceful outcome in Ukraine. Yet a political solution cannot be reached if only one side is committed to forging it; one cannot effectively implement this roadmap with parties who fail to keep their word. Russia and its proxies must change course.

Ambassador Tagliavini, as you mentioned last week in your briefing to the UN Security Council, a sustained ceasefire is impossible to achieve without a secure border. In Minsk, all sides agreed to permanent monitoring of the Russia-Ukraine border and the creation of a security zone along the border. Yet, Russia has not allowed the Ukrainian government to regain control of its side of the international border. Moreover, Russia has refused to press the separatists to allow the Special Monitoring Mission access to the border area. It also rejects the needed expansion of the Russian border checkpoint Observer Mission. We call on Russia to be fully committed to meaningful dialogue and the ceasefire commitments made in Minsk, including removing all weapons and fighters from Ukraine and returning control of Ukraine's international border to the rightful authorities in Kyiv.

Ambassador Tagliavini, thank you for taking the time to brief us today, and for your fact-based assessment. Russia's failure to implement the commitments it made in Minsk is plain for all to see. We pledge to support your efforts to ensure that all signatories fulfill the commitments you so carefully and impartially helped to forge.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.