



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 Deputy Permanent Representative Kate Byrnes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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Over the past week, Ukraine's armed forces suffered the most casualties in any one-week period since the September 2015 ceasefire was signed. The fighting was especially intense yesterday in the Luhansk region, notably around Stanytsia-Luhanska, where the separatists advanced their position so that they are now on what was the Ukrainian-controlled side of the river. The fighting has also become more lethal, as combined Russian-separatist forces have increased the use of heavy weapons, including mortars, artillery, and Grad multiple-launch rocket systems, and Ukrainian forces have attempted to defend themselves. Russia and the separatists it supports must immediately take concrete steps to reduce the fighting and disengage along the line of contact.

With mounting casualties and combined Russian-separatist forces deliberately using lethal heavy weapons, an agreement on disengagement is more urgent than ever. However, SMM efforts to assess the disengagement zones that have been endorsed by the Normandy format, and are under discussion in the Trilateral Contact Group, continue to be blocked or interrupted. We call on all parties to facilitate immediate SMM access to the proposed disengagement zones.

Russia's obstructionism and obfuscation raises doubts about its commitment to a peaceful resolution to the conflict. At our previous meeting of the Permanent Council -- where Ukraine, the EU, Canada, Switzerland, Turkey, and the United States emphasized the need for disengagement -- Russia repeated its inflammatory and disingenuous rhetoric. We call on Russia to engage seriously in disengagement and follow through on its commitments to restore the ceasefire in eastern Ukraine.

In the event of an agreement on disengagement at Petrivske, Zolote, and Stanytsia-Luhanska, the SMM will need the ability to enhance monitoring with unmanned aerial vehicles and cameras. The SMM should be allowed to recover the OSCE's two long-range UAVs that Russia-backed separatists recently crashed through frequency jamming and/or live fire.

Combined Russian-separatist forces continue to obstruct the SMM's ability to report what is really happening in eastern Ukraine. As Deputy Chief Monitor Hug told OSCE delegations on July 11, the SMM faces serious restrictions that impede its ability to observe the international border. The refusal of Russia-backed separatists to provide security guarantees

that would allow the SMM to establish a presence near the international border is consistent with a policy purposefully designed to keep the OSCE in the dark. As it committed to do when it signed the Minsk agreements, Russia must ensure the SMM full and unfettered access throughout Ukraine, including areas along the international border.

Even as Russia and the separatists prevent the SMM from being able to fully and accurately report on the situation in Ukraine, Russia distorts information from SMM reports to present a false picture of the conflict. Last week, for example, the Russian Foreign Ministry cherry-picked SMM crater analysis to assert that Ukraine was responsible for 70 percent of all ceasefire violations. This was a wholly inaccurate characterization of information contained in the SMM reports. As SMM reports show, combined Russian-separatist forces routinely fire heavy military weapons from civilian areas, including from the roofs of apartment buildings, in an effort to draw Ukrainian fire.

In response to the delegations of the Netherlands, Australia, Ukraine, and the Russian Federation, which marked the two-year anniversary of the downing of MH-17, the United States also wishes to remember those who perished on July 17, 2014, as well as their loved ones who were left behind. I would like to especially cite the Permanent Council declaration of July 18, 2014, when all OSCE participating States called for a full and credible accounting of the tragedy; supported an open, transparent, and independent international investigation, including expert participation from the Ukrainian, Malaysian, and Dutch governments; and agreed to refrain from any interference with the investigation. Recalling UN Security Council Resolution 2166, we continue to believe it is our moral obligation to the memory of the victims and our duty in the face of international law to bring to justice those responsible.

The United States supports the work of the Normandy format and the Trilateral Contact Group in its efforts to develop security and political packages in parallel. As negotiations continue, we must be mindful that the situation on the ground is worsening, and civilians are bearing the cost. For negotiations to be successful, Russia must exercise its influence over the separatists to reduce the fighting.

The United States remains fully committed to achieving a peaceful resolution that recognizes and respects Ukraine's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. We once again call on Russia and the separatists to stop the violence and fully implement their Minsk commitments. In this respect, we also call attention to the illegal detention of Crimean filmmaker Oleh Sentsov, and the sad fact that he spent his 40th birthday in a Russian jail yesterday on July 13. We remind Russia that our sanctions will remain in place until it fully implements its Minsk commitments. Our separate Crimea-related sanctions will also remain in place until Russia ends its occupation of Crimea and returns that piece of land to Ukraine.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.