



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **On Russian Military Activities Near Ukraine's Border**

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer  
to a special joint-session of the Forum for Security Cooperation  
and Permanent Council, Vienna  
April 30, 2014

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We welcome the decision by Ukraine to seek this FSC-PC meeting regarding Russian military activities near Ukraine's border. We hope that it will be possible to use this meeting to clarify the situation on the ground regarding the goals, areas for the conduct of exercises, the date of conclusion of the exercises, as well as information about the forces and means that are involved.

However, this meeting begins amid serious concerns about our Ukrainian, German, Danish, Polish and Czech colleagues who were abducted by pro-Russian separatists in Slavyansk, Ukraine, on Friday, April 25, and have yet to be released.

It is critical for Russian authorities to state clearly what we all know to be true: Vienna Document inspection teams are not clandestine; the members are not "spies." This team was operating fully in the open consistent with Vienna Document provisions that Russia, as well as all other OSCE participating States, has committed to, and implemented, for decades.

The United States strongly condemns the continued unlawful detention of the German-led OSCE Vienna Document team and their Ukrainian escorts, and particularly condemns the shameful display of the international monitors on April 27 as they were paraded in front of the press.

The Vienna Document was adopted by all 57 participating States of the OSCE, including Russia. Its implementation has been a lasting source of cooperation and military transparency. Such an incident has never, to our knowledge, taken place before.

While we welcome the release of the Swedish member of the team for medical reasons, as a signatory to the Vienna Document, Russia should be using its influence with pro-Russian separatist groups to secure the immediate and unconditional release of the entire team, including the Ukrainian escorts. We are also concerned by reports of mistreatment of the Ukrainian escort officers and look to Russia to ensure their safety as well as their release.

We appreciate comments by Ambassador Kelin indicating that Russia thinks that "these people need to be freed as soon as possible" and that Russia was taking "all possible steps" to free the military observers. We would encourage Russia to explain what steps it is taking to this end. However, we believe that it is imperative for senior officials in Moscow to openly

condemn the abduction and demand the team's immediate release.

The United States and several others have condemned this heinous act, and we invite others to join us in decrying such tactics and calling forcefully for the release of the international Vienna Document observers and their escorts.

Turning to the intended focus of today's meeting, we are indeed concerned about Russia's refusal to provide further information about its unusual military activities near its border with Ukraine. Russia's decision not to attend today's joint FSC-PC meeting, as well as the FSC-PC meetings on April 7 and only the very end of the April 17 meeting, is inconsistent with the letter and spirit of the Vienna Document.

We encourage Russia to fulfill its commitments under the Vienna Document 2011, in letter and spirit. Not doing so undermines principles and commitments that have underpinned Euro-Atlantic security for years. Paragraph 16 of the Vienna Document clearly establishes that OSCE participating States with concerns about any unusual and unscheduled military activities can request meetings with the responding state and with the full FSC-PC to discuss their concerns and assess the situation. There is no provision or precedent for the responding state to refuse to attend the meetings.

Provocative Russian military drills that began last week in the area between Rostov and the Ukrainian border – which follow on a previous round of such “drills” in that region – perpetuate the atmosphere of tension, as have comments by Russian officials that Ukraine's anti-terror operation could elicit a Russian military response. While we take seriously Russian Minister Shoygu's statement on April 24 explaining that the continuing concentration of Russian forces on Ukraine's border is the result of “drills in the areas bordering Ukraine,” his comment that “if this (Ukrainian) military machine is not stopped, it will lead to greater numbers of dead and wounded” does little to calm the situation. We note the threatening comments by Russian officials that Ukrainian military and security movements within the borders of Ukraine could elicit a Russian military response, in contrast to Russian statements that Russia can exercise its military where it pleases within its national territory without giving cause for concern.

We see nothing routine about Russia's ongoing military activities near its border with Ukraine. The composition, positioning, and continuing extended deployment in the field of these forces continue to make clear that this is not a routine and previously scheduled military exercise.

Russian military activity of any type on the border with Ukraine does nothing to stabilize the situation in the region and serves to escalate tensions.

It was publicly reported that Russian Defense Minister Shoygu told U.S. Secretary of Defense Hagel on April 28 that Russian forces returned to their “permanent stations” after Ukraine said it had no intention of using its army against unarmed citizens. However, we note that, while Shoygu described the units as having returned to their “permanent stations,” we have no evidence to support the veracity of that claim. It appears to us that, in fact, about 40,000 Russian troops remain not at their permanent home garrisons but rather, arrayed around Ukraine's border with Russia. We call again on Russia to de-escalate tensions, reduce its troop strength to pre-crisis numbers and positions, and return troops to their peacetime locations.

Reports also suggest that the number of forces involved in these military activities exceed the thresholds for notification and observation under the Vienna Document, though I wish to emphasize that this is not necessary in order to invoke Chapter III.

This is what the Vienna Document is for: expressing concerns and seeking information. If Russia had participated in the joint FSC-PC meeting on April 7, or attended the full meeting on April 17, it would have heard the concerns of participating States. At those meetings and today, Russia would have had an excellent opportunity to respond constructively.

We urge Russia to offer to accept additional Vienna Document inspections to enable its OSCE partners to confirm the level and types of Russian military activity in the region of the Ukrainian border.

It is important that OSCE participating States implement not only the letter, but also the spirit of the Vienna Document in order to build confidence. Recent events have highlighted areas in the document that need to be improved, such as ensuring that inspection quotas are available in crisis situations and notifications are provided for a broader range of military activities. These could be addressed as part of the effort to update the Vienna Document.

Finally, we would note with serious concern reports of Russian-supported military activity in eastern Ukraine. Actions to promote instability on the territory of another OSCE participating State are wholly inconsistent with the basic tenets of cooperative relations among the States. The risk is real that these fomented tensions could lead to further violence and loss of life. We have already seen movement in that direction, with the killing and attempted assassination of Ukrainian local officials and civilians.

The United States underscores that the right next step is de-escalation. We believe that Russia should step back, politically and militarily, and allow Ukraine to proceed with the important internal constitutional and electoral processes that will enable its people to choose their future.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.