



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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The United States remains deeply concerned by the fighting in eastern Ukraine. The ceasefire appears to be unraveling, and violence has reached peak levels not seen since August 2015. To safeguard civilian lives, all parties must act now to secure a real and comprehensive ceasefire and complete disengagement. Steps must be taken to improve the situation for civilians living in the conflict zone, including opening additional crossing points at the line of contact. Yesterday in the Trilateral Contact Group, the Ukrainian government restated its willingness to reopen the vehicle crossing at Zolote. In the meantime, Russia and the separatists continue to renege on their pledge made nearly a year ago in the Humanitarian Group to open this crossing point. We hope that the crossing point will be demined, opened as quickly as possible, and kept open.

Currently, the only crossing point in all of Luhansk remains the footbridge at Stanytsia Luhanska – a bridge that the SMM reports is at high risk of collapse. Repairs on this bridge cannot commence until security guarantees are put in place that would be greatly aided by disengagement. However, combined Russian-separatist forces continue to commit ceasefire violations in and around the Stanytsia Luhanska disengagement zone, including mounting a four hour attack on November 8. Such provocative actions prevent disengagement, which can only begin after a seven-day ceasefire. Last week, our distinguished Russian colleague stated in the Permanent Council that the Donbas “should not be cut off from Ukraine.” We agree fully, and call upon Russia and the separatists to reopen the crossing points that link separatist-held territory with the rest of Ukraine, and to create the conditions necessary for disengagement at Stanytsia Luhanska.

We are deeply concerned by the recent build-up of combined Russian-separatist forces outside of Mariupol; combined Russian-separatist forces shelled a Mariupol suburb on November 2. This attack, carried out by long-range artillery proscribed under the Minsk agreements and recently moved to the line of contact, is chillingly reminiscent of a January 2015 attack on Mariupol in which Russia-led forces killed over 30 civilians and injured scores more. Russia must immediately withdraw these and all other proscribed weapons in line with the Minsk agreements.

Interference with the SMM's monitoring undermines prospects for a sustainable ceasefire and disengagement. Attacks and threats against the SMM put the lives of our monitors at risk and are completely unacceptable. We are particularly concerned by initial reports of an incident which occurred yesterday in separatist-held Donetsk. As monitors fled from shelling, they reported that the shelling appeared to be following them even though the patrol was moving away at high speed. While attempting to leave the area, the monitors noted a large truck had been parked across the road 150 meters ahead of them, and two individuals next to the truck were making obscene gestures at the monitors. This incident is deeply disturbing. It suggests SMM monitors were deliberately targeted by shelling and individuals in this separatist-controlled area were intent on blocking their escape. It is imperative that the SMM fully reflect this incident in its reporting, and review the incident to ensure it has in place adequate procedures to mitigate risk to its personnel who are operating in a conflict zone. It is equally imperative that the JCCC investigate the incident and ensure that those responsible are held to account.

Colleagues, each week in the Permanent Council we hear that the Russian Federation wants peace in Donbas. Unfortunately, Russian actions on the ground in eastern Ukraine continue to suggest otherwise. If Russia truly wants a peaceful resolution to this conflict, it will stop arming, training, and fighting alongside separatist forces, particularly at Stanytsia Luhanska, so disengagement can move forward. If Russia truly wants a peaceful resolution to this conflict, it will allow free, unfettered and safe access for all SMM monitors throughout the conflict area and up to the international border. If Russia truly wants a peaceful resolution to this conflict, it will stop attacking Ukraine's communities with multiple launch rocket systems. If Russia truly wants a peaceful resolution to this conflict, it will direct the separatists it backs to finally provide the SMM with a full, accurate inventory of its arsenal in eastern Ukraine, and fulfill requirements to withdraw these weapons into storage sites and holding areas. If Russia truly wants a peaceful resolution to this conflict, it will stop all actions that undercut Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, for example, reversing its policy of recognizing separatist phony passports and license plates. Only Russia's actions – not its rhetoric – will demonstrate its commitment to the Minsk agreements.

We hope that the Normandy Quartet will soon reach an agreement on a comprehensive roadmap for implementing the Minsk Agreements, laying out a sequence of security and political steps for full implementation. But some steps do not need to wait for an agreement on the roadmap, especially a comprehensive seven-day ceasefire at Stanytsia Luhanska. In addition, weapons and military positions must be withdrawn from homes, schools, and hospitals, which put civilians in danger. We are concerned by recent SMM reports of Ukrainian military positions in a handful of Ukrainian towns and villages, and call upon Ukraine to withdraw positions from civilian areas. In doing so, we note, once again, that the SMM has found far more combined Russian-separatist military positions in densely-populated areas on the separatist side of the contact line. This despite the fact that Russian-led separatist forces have downed UAVs and continue to severely restrict SMM access.

We also call for agreement within the Trilateral Contact Group to ensure critical infrastructure is not damaged during the course of combat. During our last Permanent Council meeting, Ukraine highlighted the very real danger of an environmental disaster if chemical facilities are struck by artillery fire. If ruptured, canisters of liquefied chlorine at a water treatment plant in separatist-held Yasynuvata -- one of the most active hotspots on the contact line -- could spew a toxic cloud of gas endangering up to 400,000 people. Such

facilities must be safeguarded from hostilities, and the Trilateral Contact Group should develop a response plan in the tragic event damage is done.

We once again draw the Permanent Council's attention to Russia's occupation and attempted annexation of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula. Russia is building up its military presence in this region by refurbishing Ukrainian and Soviet infrastructure such as the "Dnepr" radar station, expanding bases, and stationing more soldiers on Ukrainian soil. This foreign military buildup is occurring without Ukraine's consent and in violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

We also remain deeply troubled by ongoing reports of human rights abuses in Crimea. This week six more Crimean Tatars were sent for forced psychiatric evaluation in retaliation for their opposition to Russia's occupation. These men are among 19 Tatars who have been charged with membership in "Hizb-ut-Tahrir," an Islamic organization that is legal in Ukraine but banned in Russia. As we stated when Tatar leader Ilmi Umerov was subjected to this same disturbing practice in August, this is an abusive and arbitrary act reminiscent of Soviet-era practices. We call on Russia to end its practice of punitive psychiatry.

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 over this land 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.