



United States Mission to the OSCE

Ongoing Violations of OSCE Principles and Commitments by the Russian Federation and the Situation in Ukraine

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Special Permanent Council, Vienna
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The citizens of Ukraine celebrated the 23rd anniversary of their independence on August 24. They did so as the Russian Federation's ongoing violations of OSCE principles and commitments, and its efforts aimed at sowing turmoil, continued to remind the Ukrainian people of how precious independence and individual freedoms—the kinds of freedoms that Russian citizens are routinely denied by their corrupt and repressive government—are. The United States reiterates its strong support for the people of Ukraine and its condemnation of Russia's support for armed separatists in eastern Ukraine and its occupation of Crimea.

Mr. Chairperson, in recent days, and in the last 24 hours, there have been mounting reports of large numbers of Russian military personnel inside Ukraine, columns of Russian tanks and armored vehicles crossing into southeastern Ukraine from Russia, and a Russian helicopter gunship attack on a Ukrainian border post. These indicate that a new Russian escalation, including a Russia-directed counteroffensive, may be underway in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts—actions that are in clear violation of international law and OSCE principles and commitments. In addition, Russia continues to supply separatist fighters with tanks, armored vehicles, artillery, and multiple rocket launchers. Russia has fired self-propelled artillery into Ukraine and has further violated Ukrainian territory by crossing over the border to fire. We are aware that Russia has sent its newest air defense systems, including the SA-22, into eastern Ukraine.

Mr. Chairman, as if these actions were not disturbing enough, this past week, we were shocked and outraged at the abduction and murder of Lithuania's Honorary Consul Mykola Zelenec by Russia-backed separatist groups in Luhansk. We join Lithuania and the entire international community in mourning Mr. Zelenec's death and extend our heartfelt condolences to his family and friends. This horrific crime is but one example of the terrible price – abduction, torture, death – that has been exacted upon so many because the Russian Federation is afraid of the commitment the people of Ukraine have to a stable, democratic, and unified Ukraine.

Despite the international community's calls for peace, Russia continues to escalate tensions with activity that is extremely dangerous and provocative. If Russia is serious about peace, or sincerely cares about the humanitarian situation in eastern Ukraine, it must stop supporting violence through the flow of weapons, personnel, and materiel across the border. Moscow's denial that it is destabilizing Ukraine is offensive and absurd, given the overwhelming and mounting body of evidence.

Russia's so-called humanitarian aid will not distract the international community from the substantial and sustained contributions Russia is making to the ongoing violence and destruction in eastern Ukraine and Crimea. Colleagues, these days you don't see it so much, but in the 1980s on many street corners in New York, one could find a man with a card table who would entice naïve passersby to engage in a game—in one version of this game, there was a marble under one of three plastic cups—the hoodlum would move the cups quickly, in front of your eyes, telling you to watch the marble. When he stopped he'd ask which cup it was under—and inevitably the passerby fell for the trick and guessed the wrong one. The Kremlin is playing a hoodlum's game—sending Potemkin convoys to distract from its egregious actions that are the very cause of humanitarian concerns. Don't fall for it. Our position remains clear: no Russian personnel, arms, or other materiel—whether labeled humanitarian assistance or anything else—should enter Ukraine without the Ukrainian government's consent. The government of Ukraine has shown it is committed to providing humanitarian relief with the support of the international community. We have already seen Ukrainian humanitarian aid distributed in communities in Luhansk oblast with the assistance of international humanitarian organizations. If Moscow really cared about any of the people in Ukraine—including those for whom it proclaims a sense of ethnic solidarity—it would stop using them as pawns and start treating them as persons. The Kremlin has zero credibility on humanitarian issues—but if the Kremlin wants to help, then they should make private phone calls and public statements to instruct the separatists they support and sustain to allow unfettered access to those communities in need so that they can receive humanitarian aid.

President Putin has claimed that Russia will do everything possible to make sure the crisis in Ukraine ends as soon as possible. He must take action consistent with international law and Russia's OSCE and Budapest Memorandum commitments.

Mr. Chairperson, we note the meeting between President Poroshenko and President Putin in Minsk this week. We strongly support a peaceful resolution to the crisis in Ukraine and hope that any high-level talks between the two leaders are productive. To reiterate: Russia needs to back any peaceful words with peaceful actions—something it has yet to do.

As we have stated before, if Russia wants to be part of an enduring solution to the crisis in Ukraine's east, it must end its support to separatist fighters, cease its destabilizing and provocative actions in Ukraine, and release all hostages. It must also end the occupation of Crimea, which remains an integral part of Ukraine.

Mr. Chairperson, in concluding, and dear colleagues, amidst all of this, and in a world in which we have enough tragedy without making more, let us not forget that the crisis in Ukraine is a man-made crisis, a tragedy manufactured and orchestrated by a Kremlin that has shown disregard for international law, that has flouted Russia's commitments, and destroyed Russia's credibility as a mature and serious international actor, and that has exacted tremendous, unnecessary human costs. These costs are borne not only by the people of Ukraine—by journalists and soldiers and teachers and nurses and activists and children who deserve a future of their making and their choosing. They have been borne by the passengers of MH17 and their thousands of loved ones, they are borne by the people of Russia, already robbed by a corrupt regime, their future now blighted by the Kremlin's irresponsible international actions. They are borne by the mothers of Russian soldiers—some of whom have reportedly died or been captured in the fight that President Putin denies he's part of, while journalists who try to report the story are abused. My heart goes out to those

mothers—who want nothing more than a dignified burial for their sons, but who the Kremlin sees as less important than its desire to sow tragedy in Ukraine.

Mr. Chairperson, as Russia’s destabilizing actions exacerbate the crisis in eastern Ukraine, it is more important than ever for the OSCE to take a strong and robust role. We urge that the Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) ramp up its mission to the full strength of 500 monitors as soon as possible in order to serve as the critical eyes and ears on the ground. While we welcome the acquisition of unmanned aerial vehicles to support SMM operations, SMM monitors have proven to be the most valuable tool in our toolbox and we urge full staffing and expansion of the SMM in permissive environments.

The people of the United States have stood proudly with the people of Ukraine as they seek a peaceful, democratic, and prosperous future. Whether in Kyiv, Crimea, or Donetsk, the United States is firmly determined to support Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.