



**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 a Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. Gregory Macris  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
January 17, 2019

+The cease-fires – altogether there were five in 2018 – were intended to provide a temporary reprieve from the violence for civilians facing the brunt of Russia's aggression in the Donbas. However, Russia no longer even pretends that a break in fighting will lead to its implementing its commitments under the Minsk agreements.

Mr. Chair, the United States reiterates its call for Russia, the instigator of this conflict, to direct the forces it arms, trains, leads, and fights alongside to comply with the terms of the cease-fire, withdraw its weapons from the line of contact as proscribed by the Minsk agreements, and disengage its forces. This is the only way to mitigate the hardship and danger this conflict inflicts upon civilians who are caught in the crossfire.

The United States regrets that the sides have failed to agree on the release and exchange of detainees, despite the December 2017 precedent where agreement between the sides allowed over 300 detainees to return home. We urge Russia and Ukraine to fulfill this most basic step under the Minsk agreements.

Mr. Chair, more than seven weeks have passed since Russia rammed, fired upon, and seized three Ukrainian naval vessels and their personnel, in violation of international law. These actions, which directly contravene our shared OSCE principles and commitments, have been condemned by this Council as well as the United Nations. This act was another in a series of direct actions Russia has undertaken to destabilize Ukraine. The United States urges Russia to release the Ukrainian personnel immediately, return the Ukrainian vessels, and respect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, extending to its territorial waters.

Mr. Chair, regrettably, civilians bear the brunt of this conflict as casualties continue to mount. On January 10 and 11, the SMM confirmed four elderly civilians died in separate incidents while waiting to cross the line of contact. While authorities improved the conditions at some crossing-point facilities last year, insufficient support and staffing and long wait times are a burden on civilians, many of whom are elderly. Additional crossing points, increased staffing, and improvements to existing facilities could all reduce the strain and risk of loss of life.

As many of our colleagues have mentioned previously, the threats, harassment, and violence by Russia-led forces directed at SMM monitors continue. On December 24, five armed Russian proxies approached an SMM patrol monitoring the security situation in Russia-controlled Khoroshe, and one of the men, who was visibly intoxicated, attacked and damaged the SMM vehicle. On January 2, two armed Russian proxies stopped an SMM patrol approaching Russia-controlled Sofiivka and verbally abused and threatened the patrol members.

Russia-led militants frequently use access restrictions to prevent the SMM from carrying out its mandate. According to the SMM's reporting, in 2018 SMM monitors faced 1,178 movement restrictions not related to mines or unexploded ordnances, a 34-percent increase compared with 2017. The SMM notes that the vast majority – 83 percent – of such restrictions took place in Russia-controlled areas. The United States demands that Russia and its proxies stop interfering with SMM patrols and monitoring capabilities. We also call upon the sides to refrain from impeding SMM UAV flights and to allow full, free, and safe access for the SMM throughout Ukraine, according to its mandate.

Mr. Chairperson, the United States is saddened that hundreds of Ukrainians could not visit their families in Crimea for the Orthodox holidays. Fears of detentions and arrests prevented many from traveling as Russia's targeting of Crimean Tatars and other activists continues unabated. On January 11, Russian security forces illegally searched the homes of three Crimean Tatars in the village of Razdolne. Crimean Tatars, such as Edem Bekirov, Kazim Ametov, Bekir Degermendzhi, Asan Chapuh, and Ruslan Trubach were unjustly imprisoned on dubious charges and are suffering from severe health problems, for which they have been denied appropriate medical treatment. The United States calls on Russia to release all arbitrarily detained Crimean Tatars and activists of all ethnicities.

The United States fully supports Ukraine's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, extending to its territorial waters. We do not, nor will we ever, recognize Russia's purported annexation of Crimea. We join our Ukrainian and other partners in affirming that our Minsk-related sanctions against Russia will remain in place until Russia fully implements its Minsk commitments. The separate, Crimea-related sanctions will remain in place until Russia returns full control of the peninsula to Ukraine.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.