



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Ukraine

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Special Permanent Council, Vienna
March 7, 2014

Thank you very much Madam Chair, and thank you again to the Chairmanship for holding this meeting. I think it does afford us a useful opportunity to discuss the ongoing crisis.

I share the perspective of our distinguished Russian colleague that our distinguished Turkish colleague just remarked on, that obviously there are conversations happening elsewhere, at a very high political level, that have a bearing here on what we can do and when. So I'd like to comment about the broader context of the U.S. position first, and then say a little bit more about what we might be able to do here.

As President Obama has made clear, the United States is pursuing and reviewing a wide range of options in response to Russia's ongoing violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, actions that constitute a threat to peace and security and a breach of international law, including Russia's obligations under the U.N. Charter and of its 1997 military basing agreement with Ukraine, and that are inconsistent with the 1994 Budapest Memorandum and the Helsinki Final Act.

In addition, the so-called "referendum" that was announced yesterday, President Obama has also made clear that as such a referendum is inconsistent with international law and with Ukraine's own constitution, it will not be recognized as anything other than an act of theater taking place against the backdrop of military incursion.

At the same time, as the President has said, we seek to work with all parties to achieve a diplomatic solution that de-escalates the situation and restores Ukraine's sovereignty. We call on Russia to take the opportunity before it, to resolve this crisis through direct and immediate dialogue with the government of Ukraine; the immediate pullback of Russia's military forces to their bases; the restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity; and support for the urgent deployment of international observers and human rights monitors who can assure that the rights of all Ukrainians are protected, including ethnic Russians, and who will provide support for the Ukrainian government efforts to hold a free and fair election on May 25th.

That is the backdrop of the U.S. position at the highest level. Now I want to say a little bit about what we can do here.

I saw last night on CNN, Foreign Minister Lavrov commented that the OSCE was not

proving a fruitful forum for dialogue right now, and I got a little bit worried that my Russian colleague Andre had been calling him and telling him about me. But I think the OSCE can prove a fruitful forum for dialogue right now. We should have a dialogue about what actions we can take – what we can do – because while Ambassador Kelin is quite right that there are political conversations happening that we are not part of right now, we, the individuals around this table, can have our own conversations about what actions are available, and serve up the actions and tools to more senior political levels so they are available to them to help resolve the situation. And we should be able to have a dialogue about that.

In this respect, I think it's important to underscore that monitors really are the way forward. We have heard time and again – and we've heard a little bit more of it today – that there are different representations of facts that are happening. That's part of our dialogue. Monitors help address this. There is, I think, a shared perception that there are instability and tensions on the ground. Monitors can help address this. There's a shared perception that there are wrongs being committed. Monitors can help address this as well, not only in the sense of investigating, but simply being eyes and ears can provide a dissuasive force that calms the situation and prevents bad things from happening.

With respect to monitors, I think it's important that we all understand and reaffirm that the whole idea behind monitoring is that it is politically neutral; it is an opportunity to get eyes and ears on the ground, and it should not be seen as aggressive in any way by anyone. It is a politically neutral tool in order to get facts straight.

Secondly, as others have said, access is critically important. We know there is the Vienna Document team on the ground, and we've heard that it has been denied access now three times to the Crimean peninsula. This is both unacceptable and unfortunate. The purpose behind the visit is to provide impartial reporting and to assist in eliminating concerns about the situation on the ground. So we encourage everyone around this table to support maximum access for the team to all of Ukraine, including the Crimean peninsula, in order to provide transparency and unbiased reporting on the situation in the region.

And just as a practical suggestion, we heard Ambassador Kelin raise his concerns with the suggestion that the Russian Federation was somehow obstructing this mission. I agree that we should have real facts about that, so people should go back and check where they're hearing things like this, and we should try to get real facts. Obviously part of it would be to ask the monitors themselves, which we can't do right now.

On a positive note, one of the things the Russian Federation could do – and I think that Ambassador Kelin could do this even – is to talk to the press after this meeting, saying that of course the Russian Federation supports access for monitors that are being carried out under the Vienna Document, which we all are signatories to. And just offering public support for that access, even if it doesn't resolve the questions on the ground, would be an affirmative and constructive engagement that would, I think, show a spirit of cooperation with us all on what is really a shared endeavor.

Finally, and that leads to my last point, which is that this is not a good time for Europe, for peace and security in Europe, and we shouldn't call this a good time. But it is an opportunity

for this organization. This is a regional security organization; there is a security crisis right now. This is an opportunity for us to work constructively and to take action – to not just talk, but to act. And we should see that this is an opportunity. But while it is an opportunity, if we don't take that opportunity it's quite damning. This is a regional security organization that has a major crisis, and if it cannot act – and I know that there are a range of actions underway already – but if it cannot act at both the functional level and the political level, if we cannot work together to address this crisis at both the functional level and the political level, it will lead to bigger conversations about the future of this organization.

I want to close by thanking all of those delegations that have so far volunteered resources to support the efforts already underway. I think your leadership is to be commended, and certainly we are reporting back to Washington about the positive contributions that so many have been willing to make in a spirit of support for all of the people on the ground in Ukraine.

Thank you.