



## 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 Chargé d’Affaires Harry Kamian  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
February 27, 2020

Since we last met, the situation in Ukraine has again taken a worrying turn. On February 18, Russia-backed forces executed an offensive using heavy weapons prohibited under the Minsk agreements close to the Zolote disengagement area. The Special Monitoring Mission observed several thousand explosions that day, one 22-year old Ukrainian Armed Forces soldier was killed, several more were wounded, and the residents of Zolote were reminded of how easily Russia can direct a return to the levels of violence they experienced in 2015.

The offensive was launched on the five-year anniversary of Russia-led forces’ capture of Debaltseve days after the third Minsk agreement known as the “Package of Measures” was signed, a cynical provocation that served only to demonstrate Russia’s continued aggression.

During the December 9 Normandy Summit, Russia and Ukraine committed to a full and comprehensive implementation of the ceasefire, buttressed by all necessary measures, before the end of 2019. Mr. Chair, it is clear this has not occurred. Instead, the periods of relative calm are interrupted by bursts of violence, which undermine diplomatic efforts to negotiate an end to this conflict.

It is time for Moscow to demonstrate the same political will as Ukraine. Instead, Russia seeks to undermine progress toward a peaceful resolution by disseminating falsehoods, as it attempts to shift the onus for the violence onto Ukraine.

Instead, it seems that Russian proxies are attempting to strongarm Kyiv into accepting packages on new disengagement areas, rather than negotiate in good faith on specific sites. The United States calls on Russia to engage in a truly constructive manner that makes possible a peaceful resolution of this multi-year conflict.

Exclusive of the February 18 spike, these last two weeks have seen thousands of ceasefire violations in eastern Ukraine and a number of injuries to civilians by small-arms fire,

shelling, and explosive devices. The SMM's movement was restricted on 24 occasions, all in non-government-controlled areas. The Mission's UAV assets again came under small-arms fire or experienced signal interference, most likely deliberate. We call upon Russia to exert its authority over the forces it arms, trains, leads, finances, and fights alongside and direct them to cease their harassment of SMM Monitors. Our monitors must be granted full and unfettered access to fulfil their mandate, including in Crimea. The United States condemns any attempts to interfere with or damage the Mission's UAV assets.

Mr. Chair, the United States remains concerned about the situation in Crimea. As the international community marks the sixth anniversary of Russia's occupation, occupation authorities have been busy issuing "preventative" warnings to Crimean Tatar activists, informing them that observing the anniversary could constitute banned "extremist" activity.

We are also troubled by allegations that police in Saki tortured a 17-year-old Crimean Tatar high school student on January 28; by beating, the use of stress positions, and electric shocks, in an apparent attempt to coerce his confession to a petty crime.

We were pleased to learn that Mykola Semena, a correspondent for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, was released last month after spending four years under house arrest. Semena was imprisoned for simply stating Crimea is Ukraine. He has finally been allowed to travel to mainland Ukraine, and we hope he will be able to get the medical treatment long denied to him by occupation authorities. Dozens of others remain imprisoned for their opposition to Russian occupation, and we call upon Russia to return these political prisoners to their homes and families.

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

Thank you, Mr. Chair.