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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 Courtney Austrian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
January 21, 2021

This coming spring marks seven years since Moscow, barely disguised behind the sheerest of veils, instigated an armed assault in the Donbas against its sovereign neighbor and fellow Slavic nation. This Russian adventure has cost more than 13,000 Ukrainian lives; we don't know the number of Russian lives lost, as Moscow will not admit that its soldiers have died in Ukraine.

Instead Russia has denied its involvement in eastern Ukraine to force a stalemate and create a frozen conflict. This is not a frozen conflict, however, but rather an active fight that threatens lives and livelihoods. Russia has funneled financial support to the self-styled "LPR/DPR authorities" that have no accountability to local populations and answer only to Moscow; undermined Ukraine's sovereignty by aggressively incentivizing eastern Ukrainians to take up Russian citizenship; and, in 2020, under the guise of the coronavirus pandemic, stepped up its harassment of *Special Monitoring Mission* (SMM) personnel and humanitarian organizations working with the most vulnerable of Ukraine's populations.

We cannot afford to allow this Russia-manufactured stalemate to endure. We must identify a concrete path toward a full, lasting, and peaceful resolution to this conflict, which has cost too many lives and for too long stifled opportunities for economic and social development in Ukraine. That is the challenge we face.

As Moscow stymies progress in the *Trilateral Contact Group* by hiding behind its proxies as it feigns the role of "independent observer," it is incumbent upon us, as the participating States of this Permanent Council, to consider the ways in which we can prevent the conflict in eastern Ukraine from becoming another frozen conflict in Europe.

We must continue to press Russia to implement the commitments it signed on to under the Minsk agreements, the only document in which it has conceded some role for itself in resolving the conflict. We must continue to support the Ukrainian government's efforts to reduce the toll of this ongoing conflict by pressing Russia and its proxy forces to work towards a full and comprehensive ceasefire.

Most of all, we must continue to make clear to Russia that its intransigence is not accepted and not without consequences, and that it must immediately cease its aggression and work with Ukraine on a path toward true and lasting peace.

Russia's campaign of aggression against its sovereign neighbor, including its occupation of Crimea -- where abuses of Crimean residents and the militarization of the Black Sea are part of Moscow's wide efforts to destabilize Ukraine -- contravenes all ten foundational *Helsinki Final Act* principles. It has caused the most serious threat to European security since the wars surrounding the break-up of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Neither Ukraine, nor Europe, nor Russia for that matter, can afford to see this conflict dragged out for years to come. The costs are simply too high.

Madam 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. The Crimea-related sanctions will remain in place until Russia returns full control of the peninsula to Ukraine.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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