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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  
May 20, 2021

Thank you, Madam Chair.

It has been well over a month since Russia launched provocative military actions along its border with Ukraine and in occupied Crimea, deploying more forces to this area than at any time since 2014, when it invaded and seized Crimea and started an unprovoked conflict in eastern Ukraine. To date, Russia has offered no reasonable explanation for its aggressive build-up of troops and hardware.

Although Russia has removed certain forces and hardware from these areas, its military posture remains significantly heightened.

Daily ceasefire violations—dramatically lowered for months after the July 2020 OSCE-brokered “additional measures” went into effect—now routinely number in the hundreds. The Special Monitoring Mission continues to report civilian casualties, mostly due to explosive devices, as well as damage to civilian infrastructure, including homes, schools, and hospitals.

At the same time, Russia—even as it tries to deny its responsibility for the conflict in eastern Ukraine—appears increasingly intent on violating Ukraine’s territorial integrity. It continues to undermine Ukraine’s sovereignty, most recently by orchestrating visits to Russia-controlled parts of Ukraine by Russian ‘political party’ officials and issuing hundreds of thousands of Russian passports to Ukrainians residing in Russia-controlled territory.

Contributing further to tensions in eastern Ukraine is the intensified harassment of the Special Monitoring Mission by Russia-led forces. This week, the SMM reported multiple instances of freedom of movement restrictions against its monitors, as well as several incidents of signals interference or targeting by small arms fire of the Mission’s UAVs. Let’s be clear, the targeting of the SMM and its technical assets is unacceptable. We call on Russia to direct the forces it arms, trains, leads, and fights alongside to cease this behavior.

SMM monitors should not have to endure lengthy and arbitrary delays at checkpoints staffed by Russia-led forces, nor should they be accosted and pressed to present customs forms or other documentation in contravention of SMM’s mandate in Ukraine. Instead, the monitors’ freedom of movement should be facilitated so they are able to complete their mission throughout all of Ukraine, including in Russia-occupied Crimea.

We remind Russia of its commitments under the full package of the Minsk agreements. The *Minsk Protocol* of September 5, 2014, as signed by the members of the *Trilateral Contact Group*: **the OSCE, Ukraine and Russia**. Russia should honor its commitment and fully implement those Minsk agreements. The *Protocol* specifically calls for the removal of all unlawful military formations from Ukraine. That same point is repeated in the *Minsk Memorandum of Understanding*, signed two weeks later, again by the **OSCE, Ukraine, and Russia**.

Russia, as a signatory to all three documents, is bound to uphold all elements of the Minsk agreements, to include “withdrawal of all foreign armed formations, military equipment as well as mercenaries from the territory of Ukraine.” I remind this council that Russia-led forces continue to attack the Ukrainian Armed Forces on Ukrainian territory with Russia’s weapons, bought with Russia’s money, and do so under Russia’s leadership. Russia is the aggressor in this conflict. We all know that.

We also know Crimea is Ukraine. The United States remains deeply concerned about the deteriorating human rights situation in Crimea and we will speak more in a separate statement about Russia’s occupation of Crimea, its treatment of Crimean Tatars, ethnic Ukrainians, and others, and the political prisoners Moscow continues to hold.

We call on Russia to end its occupation of Crimea, release all political prisoners, and cease its cruel treatment of residents of Crimea. We further call on Russia to fulfill the commitments it *voluntarily undertook* in the Minsk agreements on September 5 and 14, 2014 to remove all military troops and hardware from eastern Ukraine.

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 our Ukraine-related sanctions against Russia will remain in place until Russia fully implements its Minsk commitments and returns full control of Crimea to Ukraine.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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