



## **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 U.S. Ambassador Daniel B. Baer  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
May 12, 2016

The United States welcomes the overall reduction in fighting in eastern Ukraine following the April 30 ceasefire recommitment, but we are concerned that combined Russian-separatist forces continue their pattern of ceasefire violations and provocations. Russia and the separatists have consistently followed each ceasefire in eastern Ukraine with renewed attacks on government forces. The SMM recorded over 1,000 ceasefire violations on May 8 alone. We call upon combined Russian-separatist forces to end their provocations and fully respect the ceasefire. We encourage the SMM to attribute responsibility for ceasefire violations whenever it can, which will help the international community put pressure on violators to honor the current, tenuous ceasefire.

The presence of heavy weapons in separatist-controlled areas and in close proximity to the line of contact means small arms fire can quickly escalate to full-scale violence. Combined Russian-separatist forces have declared only a fraction of their weaponry to the SMM, which has nonetheless reported the presence of an undiminished arsenal of heavy weapons in separatist-held Luhansk, including tanks, howitzers, armored combat vehicles, and surface-to-air missile systems. Combined Russian-separatist forces claimed that these weapons were in Luhansk for a parade, even though their presence was clearly contrary to the Minsk agreements. This week alone, the SMM observed fourteen times as many proscribed weapons in separatist-held areas as they found in areas under government control. This, even though Russian-separatist forces continue to deny unfettered, safe access to the SMM. We call upon Russia and the separatists to withdraw their weapons to storage sites and holding areas immediately. Given its obvious influence with the separatists and the fact that it arms, trains, and fights alongside them in Ukraine, Russia clearly has the ability to ensure that the separatists withdraw proscribed heavy weapons. We underscore once again that local elections in certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk cannot be held at gunpoint.

Colleagues, two weeks ago both the chair of the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) and the chair of the TCG's humanitarian working group expressed their hope that prisoners would at last be exchanged in large numbers, on the basis of the all-for-all principle in the Minsk Package of Measures. Such an exchange would help build much-needed confidence and restore positive momentum for diplomatic talks. We applaud the Government of Ukraine for agreeing to release two prisoners for every one released by the separatists in order to jump-start the process. Unfortunately, the separatists have reneged on a prisoner exchange agreement. We hope to see progress on prisoner exchanges in the coming days. Of course, Russia must also release those it

unjustly holds on Russian territory, including Nadiya Savchenko, consistent with its obligations under the Minsk agreements.

No less important is the issue of missing persons. Hundreds of families are in anguish, not knowing whether their loved ones are alive or dead. Such is the fate of Victoria Ostrovskaya, a resident of Horlivka, whose husband Victor disappeared nearly two years ago after leaving home to care for his disabled mother. We recognize Ukraine's good faith efforts in this area, as it has given the International Committee of the Red Cross access to its detainees and expressed support for the establishment of a mechanism on missing persons. We call upon so-called separatist authorities to work with the ICRC and others to help facilitate the accounting of those missing in the conflict.

Long lines of civilians waiting at the line of contact demonstrate the need for more safe crossing points. We recognize Ukraine's commitment to open another crossing point in Zolote, and call on Russia and the separatists to take the steps necessary for this positive development to occur. The Russian Federation and the separatists it backs should allow demining of the area and pull heavy weapons back from Zolote and all crossing points. We remind the international community that Russia and the separatists have blocked access to international humanitarian organizations since last summer, depriving residents of the Donbas much needed food and medicine. Russia and the separatists must reverse that policy immediately and allow the delivery of lifesaving assistance.

Madam Chair, colleagues, Russia's ongoing abuses and defiance of OSCE principles and commitments occur not just in the Donbas but in Russian-occupied Crimea. On May 6, Russian authorities arrested more than 50 Crimean Tatars leaving a mosque after Friday prayers for not having their passports to present to the police. This incident, sadly, is not isolated, but part of a systematic campaign of oppression and discrimination against the Crimean Tatar community and anyone else who dares to voice disagreement with the de facto authorities. U.S. sanctions against the Russian Federation related to its occupation of Crimea will remain in place until the occupation ends and Russia returns control of Crimea to Ukraine. Sanctions imposed upon the Russian Federation for its aggression in eastern Ukraine will also remain in place until Russia fully implements its commitments in the Minsk agreements.

Thank you, Madam Chair.