



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 Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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The current effort toward disengagement provides a window of opportunity to put in place a lasting ceasefire in eastern Ukraine, as Ambassadors Sajdik and Apakan told the Permanent Council last week. While we recognize signs of progress on disengagement – such as the withdrawal of forces on both sides of the contact line at Petrivske and Zolote – the Framework Decision on Disengagement must be implemented in full to have a lasting impact. It is critical that the sides move forward on disengagement in Stanytsia Luhanska. Time is running out, and we call on the Russian Federation take the following steps immediately:

First, halt all attacks on Ukrainian positions. Between October 2 and 9, the SMM found impact craters just south of Ukrainian positions at Stanytsia Luhanska, confirming Ukrainian reports that combined Russian-separatist forces continue their direct fire on Ukrainian positions. The Framework Decision on Disengagement is explicitly clear on this point: a comprehensive seven-day ceasefire must precede disengagement in each area. This benchmark is a crucial step to building the confidence necessary for Ukrainian forces to withdraw. Combined Russian-separatist forces must also end attacks at other locations along the line of contact, such as in Mariupol, where two Ukrainian military personnel were killed and 11 were injured over the weekend.

Second, Russian officers assigned to the Joint Center for Command and Control (JCCC) have the responsibility to provide the security guarantees necessary for disengagement to proceed. They need to fulfill this responsibility. On October 7, Ukrainian and Russian officers assigned to the JCCC officially informed the SMM that their respective forces had pulled back to the agreed upon lines outside of Petrivske, yet the SMM's monitors were unable to immediately deploy to the site to verify the disengagement had occurred. The SMM daily report revealed that, "the Russian Federation Armed Forces officer at the JCCC did not assist in ensuring security for the SMM." Successful disengagement depends upon the SMM gaining full access to the disengagement sites and verifying that these areas remain free of military forces. These security guarantees must also be extended to Ukrainian forces as they remove their defenses from the disengagement zones. During the past week, combined Russian-separatist forces refused multiple times to guarantee the security of a Ukrainian demining team, preventing them from carrying out their work.

Third, Russia must cease imposing restrictions on the SMM's movement. The fact is that combined Russian-separatist forces remain responsible for the majority of all restrictions on the SMM's movement. An incident of particular concern occurred on October 7, when a

separatist fighter loaded his weapon and threatened to open fire on SMM monitors if they did not immediately leave the vicinity. Threats and other hostile acts against the SMM are completely unacceptable. They not only endanger individual monitors, but by extension, the OSCE's monitoring effort in Donbas as a whole.

Without full disengagement of forces and a comprehensive ceasefire, each day brings yet more suffering in the conflict area. According to the United Nations, fighting between May and August killed twice as many civilians as were lost in the first four months of the year. That number has fallen since the start of the September 1 ceasefire, but civilians will face heightened risk if disengagement fails. Civilians trying to cross the contact line continue to wait as long as 36 hours. They are trapped, at times, between checkpoints the entire night, making them vulnerable to shelling by combined Russian-separatist forces.

Disengagement represents the best chance for those living in the conflict zone to find a measure of safety. Traversing the badly damaged footbridge at Stanytsia Luhanska is increasingly perilous, yet there is no other way to cross the contact line in Luhansk oblast. Full adherence to the disengagement agreement will allow for repairs to the bridge and improve the lives of thousands of people who cross there each day. Now that forces have disengaged, we call for the reopening of the crossing point at Zolote-Pervomaisk on humanitarian grounds. We recall that the Trilateral Contact Group's humanitarian working group agreed to reopen this crossing point more than nine months ago. This is a step that will have a direct impact on the wellbeing of people living in the conflict area. We note that the Ukrainian government has already signaled its willingness to open the crossing point from its side. Russia and the separatists it backs must do significantly more to improve the conditions for people living in the parts of the Donbas which they control. Agreeing to open the Zolote-Pervomaisk crossing is a vital step.

Colleagues, Russian actions have led to the dire situation in occupied Crimea, where the mistreatment of members of the Crimean Tatar community continues. We note the recent two-year anniversary of the unsolved disappearance of Tatars Isylam Dzheparov and Dzhevdet Islyamov, just two of over ten such documented disappearances since the occupation began. We call on occupation authorities to hold the perpetrators to account. We are troubled by the recent news that occupation authorities are pressuring the young children of imprisoned Crimean Tatar activist Emir Hussein Kuku to make statements against their father that could be used to strip him of his parental rights. There have been disturbing reports that the Russian FSB's "anti-extremism" division has been conducting mass interrogations of Mejlis members. In light of recent comments by occupation authorities comparing the Mejlis to ISIL, these reports raise concerns that a new wave of repressions may be planned in connection with the recent Russian court decision that upheld the baseless designation of the Mejlis as an "extremist" organization.

In closing, let me reiterate that our Crimea-related sanctions will remain in place until Russia ends its occupation and attempted annexation of Crimea and returns control over this land to Ukraine. We also join the European Union in restating that our sanctions against Russia for its aggression in eastern Ukraine will remain until Russia fully implements its Minsk commitments.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.