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United States Mission to the OSCE

Reply to the Russian Federation on 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
April 7, 2016

I just want to respond to a few points made by our distinguished Russian colleague.

First of all, his statement that “responsibility lies entirely with the Ukrainian forces” for the deterioration on the ground is false. That statement is not borne out by the SMM reports, or by plenty of open source reporting, so I think that’s a false statement.

And second, our distinguished Russian colleague referred to the idea that Ukrainian forces had seized the areas in the “neutral zone.” I just wanted to point to the press conference that Alexander Hug gave recently, where he clarified for those who have been using this term “neutral zone” that there is no “neutral zone.” There are coordinates of a line of contact. So this is a concept, too, that is confusing and not appropriate.

Third point: our distinguished Russian colleague claimed that Ukrainian forces had “occupied” certain areas. I think we need to be clear: this is all Ukrainian territory. There is only one country that is occupying parts of Ukraine, and that is Russia.

Fourth, our distinguished Russian colleague minimized the restrictions on the OSCE SMM, particularly with respect to the SMM’s access to the border. He said that it may be the case that for one or two days they can’t go somewhere, but on the third day, they can go. And I would just like to ask a question of our distinguished Russian colleague (and perhaps he’ll need to consult with his military advisers on this): I’d like to know how many Russian tanks, howitzers, etc. can cross a border in two days’ time? Is there an upper limit to the number? Is it hundreds or thousands? How many can cross? I’d be interested in that. Just a practical answer to that question.

And finally, the points our distinguished Russian colleague makes about freedom of the press, about concerns about Mr. Grabovski’s murder, those are concerns that have been raised by others. One of the testaments to the openness of Ukrainian society is the degree to which there have been – from the Lawyers’ Association, from the Ukrainian press, from a number of civil society activists – calls for an investigation of that murder, as well as discussion of the ongoing challenges to advancing reform. I think the openness and the active engagement of Ukrainian civil society continues to be in stark contrast to that in some neighboring countries. And civil society is also the great hope and resource for Ukraine in finishing the work that was demanded by the people on the Maidan, and validated by the people in Ukraine in multiple elections since the Maidan, which is their demand for a European Ukraine that has institutions that people can trust, that is secure, safe, and prosperous

Thank you, Mr. Chair.