



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 a.i. Kate Byrnes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 26, 2015

Unfortunately, the past week has continued to show a stark disparity between what Russia and the separatists it backs say they are doing in eastern Ukraine, and what they are actually doing. They claim to be honoring the ceasefire, but in reality they are violating it on a regular basis. North of Luhansk, around the Donetsk Airport, along the strategic road connecting Donetsk and Mariupol, and in the villages east of Mariupol, the separatists continue to encroach further beyond the ceasefire line each day. The Russia-backed separatists also claim to have fully withdrawn heavy weapons from the contact line, but, despite their public claims, we can confirm that pro-Russia separatists maintain heavy weapons near the front line in violation of the Minsk agreements. Further, the SMM has reported use of these heavy weapons against Ukrainian government positions.

The Russia-backed separatists continue to block the SMM from undertaking patrols through large parts of separatist-controlled territory, particularly the area along the border with Russia. Ukrainian forces have also limited some SMM patrols, and we have raised with the Ukrainian government the need to end such practices by local commanders. We must remember, however, that restrictions on SMM movements in government-held territory are the exception, not the rule.

In contrast to Russia and the separatists it backs, we see the government of Ukraine making great efforts to implement its responsibilities under the Minsk agreements. Ukrainian government forces are withdrawing weapons and observing the ceasefire. When they fight, they do so in response to separatist provocations and in defense of themselves and Ukraine's territorial integrity. They fight in response to incidents such as the March 22 separatist mortar attack on a checkpoint in Pisky that wounded seven Ukrainian soldiers and narrowly missed SMM monitors.

We must also recognize that Ukraine has taken a bold political step to fulfil key components of the February 12 Package of Measures with the passage of legislation related to the Special Status Law.

In contrast, we see Russia say that it backs the implementation of the Package of Measures, while taking actions that threaten it and the September 2014 Minsk agreements.

Russia's broader actions throughout this crisis – including its attempt to annex Crimea by force, stoking violent rebellion in eastern Ukraine, providing financing, weapons and equipment to the separatists and sending Russian troops into Ukraine to bolster the separatists' capabilities – run counter to the commitments all OSCE states have made to comprehensive security. We know that Russian military forces continue to operate in eastern Ukraine, where they provide command and control support, operate air defense systems, and fight alongside pro-Russia separatist forces. Russia has also continued to transfer military equipment to pro-Russia separatists in eastern Ukraine. These actions violate Ukraine's sovereignty and undermine the prospects for peace.

The way out of the current crisis remains clear. We need to see the Minsk agreements fully implemented. We need to see a full ceasefire and a full pullback of heavy weapons. We need to see Russia withdraw all of its military equipment and personnel from Ukraine, and the border between Ukraine and Russia completely monitored by international observers. We need to see Russia release all hostages being held on Russian territory, including Nadiya Savchenko and Oleg Sentsov.

We need to see an environment in which legitimate elections can occur in eastern Ukraine – and that cannot happen while Russia continues to ship weapons across the border. After legitimate elections, the elected leaders will be able to enjoy the decentralized powers that Kyiv has offered and participate in the broad national dialogue needed to decide the future of Ukraine's constitution. And we need to see an end to the occupation of Crimea.

Mr. Chair, the United States believes that the Ukrainian government is sincere when it says that it wants internationally monitored elections and a national dialogue and that it is taking steps to make these possible. We sincerely hope that Russia and the separatists it backs also want elections and dialogue and will take steps to make these possible. To date, however, their actions have not matched their words – it is time for this to change.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.