



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 United States welcomes the efforts of President Poroshenko, Chancellor Merkel, and President Hollande to launch a diplomatic effort with President Putin to jumpstart the implementation of the Minsk agreements of September 2014.

We have seen the statement agreed by President Poroshenko, Chancellor Merkel, President Hollande, and President Putin this morning, and the set of measures for implementing the Minsk agreements of September 2014 that was agreed by the Trilateral Contact Group. As Chancellor Merkel and President Hollande have made clear, there is still a long road ahead of us. We understand that the first steps are a ceasefire that will begin at midnight February 15, between Saturday and Sunday, followed by a pullback of heavy weapons. The test of the work done overnight and this morning will be in the way that it translates into conditions on the ground. And that test begins immediately. Parties must demonstrate restraint.

We are particularly concerned by the ongoing assault on Debaltseve, as well as the reported announcement today of a new illegal convoy from Russia to come this weekend. These actions run contrary to the spirit of this morning's agreements.

We will assess Russia and the separatists it backs by their actions, not words. We will be prepared to impose further costs on Russia. And we will only be able to consider rolling back sanctions when the Minsk agreements of September 2014 are fully implemented.

Colleagues, it is important to remember that while we've been focused on the diplomatic efforts underway in Minsk and other cities, Russia and the separatists it backs continue to conduct a violent military offensive in eastern Ukraine, attacking well beyond the ceasefire line identified in Minsk. As we speak here, Debaltseve is undergoing an ongoing attack by the separatists. The Russia-backed separatists have attacked Kramatorsk – 50 kilometers further beyond the line of contact. On February 10, separatists fired cluster munitions from a Multiple-Launch Rocket System at Kramatorsk, killing at least seven civilians and wounding 26. A dud shell landed just 30 meters from a Special Monitoring Mission team. Again, we call on all actors to avoid the targeting of civilian areas.

The Russia-backed separatists continue to attack Ukrainian forces throughout Donbas, in the north near Luhansk, and in the south near Mariupol. With Russian support, the separatists have seized more territory and shelled civilian areas, destroyed villages, and driven more Ukrainians from their homes. These are the facts.

The people of Ukraine, including the vast, vast majority in the east, do not want this conflict. Time and again they have demonstrated their desire to live in a Ukraine that is free, whole, and democratic. Just last Friday, several hundred people evacuated Debaltseve during a truce brokered by the SMM. These people were given a choice to evacuate to the territory held either by the separatists or to territory held by the government of Ukraine. The overwhelming majority chose to go to territory held by the government of Ukraine. Only a relative few chose to go to separatist-controlled Donetsk.

All along the ceasefire line, Russia-backed separatists are launching attacks in a bid to expand the territory they control. The so-called “leaders” of the so-called “DPR” and “LPR” have said publicly that they intend to take the rest of Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts, and Russia continues to support the separatists with sophisticated arms and material.

Mr. Chair, the violence that we see in eastern Ukraine is appalling, and the most visible manifestation of Russia’s ongoing violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. We must remember that Russia continues to occupy Crimea. It continues to pretend that a so-called “referendum” in Crimea, conducted at the point of a gun, carries legal or moral weight. We do not and will not recognize that illegal referendum.

We remain deeply concerned by reports of two new arrests this week of participants in a February 2014 protest outside the Crimean Rada. The growing number of arrests of individuals involved in that protest, including the continued detention of the Mejlis Deputy Chair, Ahtem Ciygoz, have raised concerns that the authorities are planning a mass trial of Crimean Tatars and others who oppose Russia’s occupation of Crimea.

We urge Russian occupying authorities to cease their criminalization of dissent and uphold their obligations as an occupying authority with regard to freedom of expression and assembly. President Putin committed this morning to respect Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity. International law is clear: Russia must end its occupation of Crimea, which remains an integral part of Ukraine.

While we continue to work toward a diplomatic solution to the crisis, and to implement what has been already agreed, we must also make clear that if Russia continues on its current course, the international community will have no choice but to impose more costs.

As I said at the outset, the test of the agreements that were produced this morning will be in the implementation on the ground, and that implementation must begin today. The ceasefire that is supposed to start on Saturday night, and the pullback of weapons that follows after, must be implemented by Russia and the separatists it backs in order for the commitments they have made to begin to have credibility, and we must see full implementation of the Minsk agreements of September 2014.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.