



United States Mission to the OSCE

Current Security Challenges in the OSCE Area and OSCE Engagement with Ukraine

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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At the outset, I would like to offer our deepest condolences to the people of Ukraine and to the families of the victims killed and injured in Odessa last Friday. The United States mourns with the people of Ukraine. We applaud Prime Minister Yatsenyuk's immediate call for a thorough independent investigation and we look forward to the outcome of that. What we know so far suggests that a peaceful march was attacked by an armed pro-Russia mob and that events quickly and tragically escalated from there. Such violence cannot be tolerated.

Mr. Chair, since the April 17 Joint Statement on Ukraine issued in Geneva, the government of Ukraine continues to make progress on its commitments, while one particular signatory has failed to implement even one. The day after Geneva, the government of Ukraine sent a draft amnesty bill to the Rada; authorities in Kyiv dismantled barricades and opened streets in the days that followed; Maidan activists peacefully vacated the Kyiv city administration building, the handover of which was witnessed by Ambassador Apakan as well as representatives of the signatories of Geneva; and President Turchinov and Prime Minister Yatsenyuk made speeches confirming their commitment to decentralize an unprecedented amount of political and economic authority to Ukraine's regions through constitutional reform and to protect language rights. On April 14th and 29th, the constitutional reform commission held public conferences to which all the regions were invited. Ukrainian security forces instituted an Easter pause in their operations in eastern Ukraine, and sent senior officials out with the OSCE teams to Slovyansk and to other cities in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts where pro-Russia separatists are active to try to talk separatists into pursuing their aims politically rather than through violence.

I was disappointed when today our distinguished Russian colleague called our distinguished Ukrainian colleague "cynical" and said that Kyiv had done nothing. This is simply not true. The Russian Federation seems to deny the positive steps of others just as fervently as it lies about its own crimes.

The United States seeks a diplomatic solution to the current crisis and we welcome efforts of the international community to support peace and security in Ukraine. And specifically the work being carried out by the OSCE and the participating States have contributed to the Special Monitoring Mission (SMM). The OSCE Chairman-in-Office has also been engaged, as we have heard, in efforts to identify additional workable steps to a de-escalation that might benefit from OSCE support.

In addition to reconfirming our support for immediate implementation of the steps outlined on April 17, and as we review the document that the chairmanship previewed at the outset and that we and other Geneva parties received overnight, I would like to offer our views on some of the ideas that have been discussed in recent days as well as on some recent events. First, the United States is of course glad about the release of the Vienna Document hostages and their Ukrainian escorts who were held in Slavyansk. The SMM played a crucial role and we commend the SMM leadership and team members for their work through many days. Our thoughts remain with the many who are still held hostage. We call on all actors to take steps to support the security and safety of OSCE observers and monitors around the country.

We, like others, noted President Putin's statement that Russia does not support holding the separatist referendums on May 11th. Such referendums are illegal under Ukrainian law and are an illegitimate attempt to create further division and disorder in the country. The focus should be on the May 25 presidential election, which instead is an opportunity for Ukraine and all Ukrainians to help chart the future of their country.

In that regard, we also noted President Putin's statement that the May 25th presidential election is a "move in the right direction." We call on the entire international community to support Ukraine in its efforts to conduct the election.

OSCE's ODIHR has launched an unprecedented election support and monitoring mission and has reported that Ukraine is successfully implementing all the necessary procedures and requirements for free and fair elections on May 25th.

In light of the Ukrainian government's commitment to engage its citizens across the country in a conversation about priorities for reform, the United States sees the potential value of roundtables around Ukraine, facilitated by the OSCE, on dialogue, constitutional reform, and national unity that involves a broad and representative cross-section of Ukrainian society. As I said last week, dialogue is something we all support and the Ukrainian government has already begun such efforts. All actors need to take steps to make that dialogue possible.

The United States also agrees with those who have highlighted the importance of law and order in Ukraine. The government of Ukraine, through Ukraine's law enforcement and security forces, has the right and obligation to uphold law and order on Ukraine's territory. The groups who took up illegal arms and seized public buildings in contravention of law and public order in Ukraine must DISARM and leave the buildings they have seized. Once they do this, the Ukrainian security forces can halt anti-terrorist operations in those locations where order has been restored.

Yesterday, we heard positive words from Moscow. But we have heard positive words before, with no concrete actions to follow. Without the destabilizing actions of Moscow, this crisis would not be happening. Without constructive messaging and constructive action from Moscow, de-escalation will not happen.

For this crisis to end, yesterday's words have to be followed up with sustained positive actions and the cessation of destabilizing actions that undermine Ukrainian security. All actions that disrupt the May 25 presidential election and thereby prevent Ukrainian citizens from exercising their right to vote and choose their future must end, or the costs must rise.

We urge Moscow to use its influence to ensure that pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine vacate buildings, lay down arms, and end their campaign of intimidation. We also call on Moscow to pull back its forces from Ukraine's border, which is another type of intimidation.

I heard other colleagues also echo this call and I also heard our distinguished Russian colleague repeat President Putin's statement that forces have been pulled back from the border. We have no evidence to support the veracity of that claim.

While we welcome this effort to prevent a worsening of the situation of Ukraine, we must all remember that Crimea remains illegally occupied by Russian military forces. We do not accept the illegal annexation of Crimea, and the process of conducting free and fair elections on May 25 in no way acknowledges Russian claims to Crimea, which remains part of sovereign Ukraine.

We were deeply dismayed to see Mr. Dzhemilev, a world-respected human rights and political leader, denied access to the Crimean region of Ukraine. Mr. Dzhemilev briefed participating States earlier today and his report was sobering. We also condemn the threats of prosecution that come on top of a legacy of persecution.

We will be watching closely in the days ahead to ensure that all actors take concrete steps to deescalate tensions in line with the Geneva Joint Statement. Now is the time for action.

And if I may, Mr. Chair – having heard several pleas for diplomacy – let me reiterate our position that diplomacy, particularly in a crisis, should be neither ignorant of principle nor steeped in naiveté. Facts are facts and lies are lies. And part of being a good diplomat is being able to tell the difference and hold each other accountable for such lies.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.