



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 Courtney Austrian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 3, 2021

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Last week, this Permanent Council reached a reluctant consensus on a Draft Decision to extend for only two months the mandate period of the Observer Mission at the Russian Checkpoints of Gukovo and Donetsk. While the majority of the participating States supported the standard four-month roll-over of the Observer Mission’s mandate, Russia blocked consensus on this extension, imposing the reduction to a two-month renewal.

We, and other participating States, have spoken at considerable length in recent weeks about Russia’s efforts to bully this Permanent Council—most recently by forcing the Organization to accept an abbreviated mandate period that will have negative effects on the Observer Mission. Even though Russia consistently impedes its work, the Border Observer Mission, along with the Special Monitoring Mission, provides us with a valuable picture of the situation on the ground in eastern Ukraine.

We regret that Russia, instead of honoring the commitments it has made both as a member of this Permanent Council and as a signatory to all three Minsk agreements, chose to take this unhelpful position. It would be naïve of us to be surprised that Russia continues to undermine the work of a Mission upon which it has already imposed significant limitations. Is it to hide the constant flow across the Russia-Ukraine border of combatants, medical supplies, funerary service vehicles, foodstuffs, and weapons from the entire range of Russia’s arsenal?

As the principal driver of the conflict in eastern Ukraine trying to falsely cast itself as a “mediator,” Russia has a lot to hide. Starting in 2014, Russia, and the forces it arms, trains, leads, and fights alongside fueled and sustained the conflict in the Donbas. More than 13,000 people have died and tens of thousands have been wounded as a result of Russia’s aggression against its sovereign neighbor. Over one million Ukrainian citizens have been displaced, forced from their own homes as their communities suffer the damage inflicted by shelling, small arms fire, and explosive devices; the civilian population is the “collateral damage” of Moscow’s campaign to destabilize Ukraine.

In advance of Moscow’s belligerent unilateral buildup of military forces in recent months along its border with Ukraine and in occupied Crimea, Russia launched a malign narrative falsely claiming that Kyiv, and not Moscow, was engaging in military escalation.

Despite the fact that Ukraine has not changed its military posture—even in the face of Moscow’s provocations along its border and in occupied Crimea—Russia continues to perpetuate this disinformation. The United States commends Ukraine’s restraint in the face of these provocations, even as Ukrainian Armed Forces continue to suffer casualties on a regular basis, including Ukrainian servicemembers killed by Russia’s snipers.

As Russia attempts to obfuscate its role in eastern Ukraine, Russia-led forces routinely impede the work of the Special Monitoring Mission. Again this week, the SMM reported multiple instances of restrictions imposed upon its *Freedom of Movement*; the vast majority of these occurred in Russia-controlled territory. In addition, the SMM continued to report near daily occurrences of interference with its UAVs, which are targeted by small-arms fire or signals interference. The SMM must be afforded the unimpeded full *Freedom of Movement* to fulfill its mandate throughout all of Ukraine, including in Crimea, which is Ukraine’s territory.

Last week, we condemned Russia’s efforts to harass and intimidate Crimean Tatar leaders, including the *in-absentia* trial of Mejlis Chairman Refat Chubarov. We were appalled to learn of the Russia-controlled Crimean Supreme Court ruling on Tuesday to sentence Chubarov to six years imprisonment and a 200,000 ruble fine under politically-motivated charges.

This is just the latest example of Russia’s efforts to silence those who oppose Russia’s occupation of Crimea and promote a climate of terror and repression.

The United States is deeply concerned about Crimean journalist Vladyslav Yesypenko, who was arrested March 10 after covering an event marking the anniversary of the death of Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko in Simferopol. Yesypenko’s wife and Yesypenko himself assert Russian occupation “authorities” beat, tortured, and subjected him to electric shocks in order to procure a false confession to espionage and possession of an explosive device. The forced confession occurred before he was permitted to speak to an attorney. Yesypenko remains in Russia’s custody where he was deprived for 27 days of the ability to meet with a lawyer. The United States calls for his immediate release.

We urge Russia to end its occupation of Crimea, to cease its harassment of Crimean Tatars, ethnic Ukrainians, and other ethnic and religious minorities, and to release all political prisoners from Ukraine it holds in custody. We further urge Russia to adhere to its commitments as a signatory to all three Minsk agreements and to remove its forces and hardware from eastern Ukraine.

Madam Chair, the United States fully supports Ukraine’s sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, extending to its territorial waters.

We do not, nor will we ever, recognize Russia’s purported annexation of Crimea. We join our European and other partners in affirming our Ukraine-related sanctions against Russia will remain in place until Russia fully implements its Minsk commitments and returns full control of Crimea to Ukraine.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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