



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
September 3, 2015

[...] I wanted to respond to a few of the points raised by the distinguished Russian ambassador.

First, I want to reiterate my delegation's deep concern with what could be understood from comments of the Russian Federation--and since it was said this time as well as last time the Council met--that somehow the SMM's reporting is connected to the safety of SMM monitors. That can be understood as a threat and I think that is absolutely unacceptable. I hope the message will be conveyed to Moscow that such threats call into question Moscow's commitment to this organization, and certainly call into question Moscow's commitment to the safety and security of SMM monitors.

Secondly, I wanted to talk a little bit about the questions our distinguished Russian colleague raised about implementation, and why many of us have seen cause for encouragement in the Ukrainian government's pressing forward with elements of implementation of the political aspects of Minsk, some of which are specifically called for in the Package of Measures.

I think one of the reasons why it is encouraging that the government of Ukraine is pressing forward is that they are doing so even though the ceasefire has not held, even though they continue to lose soldiers every day, even though the peace that is the promise that they seek has not been delivered because of ongoing Russian aggression.

So, even in the face of not getting peace, the government of Ukraine is pressing forward with political progress, and this includes reforms that will have benefits for all of the people of Ukraine, not just those who are living in certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk.

Pressing forward with constitutional amendments is one of the parts of Minsk, and so the fact the government of Ukraine is pressing forward with that, the fact they are prepared to discuss the modalities for local elections as called for in Minsk in the political working group, we see as cause for encouragement.

And as we said in our statement today, we look to Russia and the separatists it backs to approach the political working group in a practical mind, to roll up their sleeves, and to talk practically about how free and fair elections, according to international standards, and under

Ukrainian law, with OSCE observation, can be held so that the people of those areas can have free and fairly elected, legitimate representatives.

Which brings me to my second point on this, which is that – as I’ve said before in this chamber – right now there are no representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk. Part of the goal of having local elections is to identify freely elected representatives. And there will be an ongoing conversation between the central government and those freely and fairly elected representatives, just as there are between the central government and local representatives, local leaders, across Ukraine.

If the Russian Federation really cares about the people of certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk being able to have a political process with the central government, then they should be doing everything possible to make sure that those free and fair elections can happen.

Finally, I’d just like to end by wholeheartedly agreeing with our Russian colleague’s sense of – and I said this in our statement as well – sense that we are in a moment of opportunity. That-- despite some failures in the ceasefire that started on September 1, despite some instances of fatal violence-- there is less violence than there has been, and that the SMM, among others, will have a role to play in helping to verify and help that ceasefire gain confidence and stick. And that all of us around this table should be doing everything possible to encourage and facilitate and support the SMM among other actors, in helping to make that stick. That also requires all of the actors on the ground to refrain from using force or staging provocations.

So I agree with our distinguished Russian colleague that this is an opportunity that should be seized, that the SMM has a clear role to play, and we certainly look to Ambassador Apakan and his team to continue their leadership in terms of delivering confidence on the ground.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.