



United States Mission to the OSCE

Anniversary of the So-Called “Annexation” of Crimea by the Russian Federation

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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It has been more than a year since, on February 27, 2014, men in military uniforms lacking any insignia occupied the Crimean Parliament building. These soldiers held Crimea hostage until the illegal so-called “referendum” on March 16 was held at the barrel of a gun. Less than a week later, on March 21, the Russian Duma joined the farce by ratifying the so-called “annexation” of Crimea to the Russian Federation.

Russia insisted then that the soldiers were local patriots protesting the change of government in Kyiv. Russia insisted that the so-called “referendum” on March 16 reflected the will of the people of Crimea to leave Ukraine and join Russia. The evidence at that time told a different truth. The truth is that these were Russian soldiers. The truth is that the sham “referendum” was held in clear violation of Ukrainian law and the Ukrainian constitution. The truth is that Crimea remains an integral part of Ukraine to this day, despite Russia’s occupation.

If there were any doubts about what happened in Crimea a year ago, President Putin himself has now cleared them up: A month after the purported “referendum,” President Putin confirmed that the mystery soldiers were in fact Russian soldiers operating under his orders. And after a year of claiming Russia had annexed Crimea in response to the so-called “referendum,” President Putin casually dispensed with that pretext, telling the world that he had in fact launched the plan to annex Crimea on February 22, the day after former President Yanukovich fled Kyiv.

Over the course of the past year, we have witnessed appalling disrespect for human rights in Crimea. Russian occupation authorities have attempted to force Russian citizenship on the Ukrainian citizens living in Crimea. Russian occupation authorities have applied repressive Russian laws restricting the freedoms of peaceful assembly, association, religion, and expression to target Crimeans who oppose the occupation. In some cases, they have even applied these laws retroactively to punish actions taken before the so-called “referendum” was held. They have particularly targeted members of the Crimean Tatar community, using anti-extremism laws to shut down the Crimean Tatar Mejlis and to jail or exile Crimean Tatar leaders. Russian occupation authorities have hidden behind the veneer of a “legal process” to abduct Crimeans who are citizens of Ukraine, such as Oleg Sentsov, and try them in Russian courts. Russian occupation authorities have detained, interrogated, and kidnapped local residents and driven NGOs and independent media out of the peninsula. These brutalities are

unacceptable, and we call on Russia to stop further abuses. Russia must allow international observers – including observers from the OSCE – to travel to Crimea in order to provide the rest of the world with more accurate information about the situation there. In particular, we encourage ODIHR to undertake a human rights assessment mission in Crimea, as invited by Ukraine.

We reiterate our call for participating States to support – and certainly to refrain from obstructing – access to Crimea by OSCE institutions and field operations, including the SMM.

Mr. Chair, by using force to attempt to acquire territory from a neighbor, Russia has dangerously undermined one of the primary pillars of the international security system, disrupting 70 years of international order. Operating completely outside the realm of international law and the Helsinki principles, Russia's actions make the world a more dangerous place for us all. Russia must withdraw from Crimea, repudiate the so-called "referendum," and return control of Ukraine's sovereign territory to the government of Ukraine. The sanctions related to Crimea will remain in place as long as the occupation continues. The United States continues to support Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and right to self-determination.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.