



## **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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As we speak here in Vienna, Russia-backed separatists continue to press their offensive against Ukrainian government forces all along and far beyond the agreed line of contact in eastern Ukraine. Debaltseve is under siege. The separatists attacked the headquarters of the Joint Center for Control and Coordination—after the Russian officers had evacuated to safety-- reportedly wounding or killing at least 17 Ukrainian military officers. Mariupol is under attack, with new shelling in civilian areas being reported just hours ago. Sadly, the massive rocket attack of January 24 did not mark the end of violence in that city, which lies far from the line of contact. And even this morning we are getting early reports of attacks in a number of places: Artemivsk, north of Horlivka; Sartana, northeast of Mariupol; Shirokyne, east of Mariupol; Pavlopil, northeast of Mariupol; This is in addition to attacks reported late last night on Shchastya, and ground combat ongoing. All of these locations are on the Ukrainian side of the agreed line of contact. Civilians on both sides of the line of contact continue to lose their lives in artillery strikes. The February 3 SMM report describing the rocket strike in Luhansk that killed two civilians reiterates the need for all parties to take the utmost care not to target civilian areas. The death toll mounts each day. The number of lives irrevocably destroyed multiplies each hour. This is a man-made tragedy. Russian aggression and the massive offensive of the separatists it backs with arms, fighters, and tactical support is exacting an ever-higher human cost.

The events of the past week have made a number of things crystal clear: Russia and the separatists it backs are not honoring their commitments under the September 2014 Minsk agreements. Despite concerted efforts by Ambassador Tagliavini and her team to hold a Trilateral Contact Group meeting with the Minsk signatories last week, the separatists refused to participate. This stands in stark contrast to the approach of the Ukrainian side, whose representatives travelled to Minsk on January 30, to be available in case the separatists decided to honor their agreements and join the meeting. Time and again over the past ten months we see that the government of Ukraine is actively pursuing peace while Russia-backed separatists escalate the violence in an effort to create “facts on the ground” that the separatists and Russia hope will enable them to re-write the commitments they have entered into. On February 3, the separatist leaders of the so-called “People’s Republics”, Alexander Zakharchenko and Igor Plotnitsky, issued a joint statement indicating that they were only open to a cessation of violence on the basis of the current contact line. This is an effort to

make President Putin's so-called "peace plan" a reality by shifting the contact line as far west as possible, and moving away from Minsk. This is unacceptable.

The events of the past week have made it clear that the separatists are not a rag-tag group of people desperately banding together to defend their homes using what equipment they can cobble together from captured Ukrainian government units. The scope of the multiple attacks carried out by the Russia-backed separatists all along the line of contact, and the scale of rocket attacks and artillery bombardments, undermine this fiction and point instead to a well-planned and sophisticated offensive. The events of the past week illustrate what everyone has long known to be true – the separatists are operating with active and pervasive support from Russia through financing, through the provision of equipment, through Russian military forces playing a coordinating role and providing command and control support.

The events of the past week have also made it clear that the only way to a peaceful resolution of this conflict is for Russia and the separatists it backs to join Ukraine in making good-faith efforts to implement the Minsk agreements. This means respecting the line of contact in the September 19 Minsk Memorandum and withdrawing all heavy weapons from within 15 kilometers of that line. This means allowing the OSCE to monitor the entire border between Russia and Ukraine and the creation of a security zone on both sides of that border. And it means immediately releasing all hostages, including those Ukrainians that are illegally imprisoned within Russia such as Nadiya Savchenko and Oleg Sentsov. Implementing these components of the Minsk agreements will allow the two sides to reach an actual ceasefire, which is necessary to implement the rest of Minsk, including economic reconstruction of the conflict-affected areas and holding legitimate local elections in those areas. Embarking on the path to a peaceful resolution to the crisis requires political will in Moscow and Kiev, and from the Russia-backed separatists. Taking anti-Semitic swipes at the elected government of Ukraine will not help the situation, and suggests that the separatist leaders want to inflame the situation further.

The bottom line is that the Minsk agreements provide the path to peace. This message is made resoundingly and abundantly clear in the statements made by the overwhelming majority of participating States in this Council each week. Recent attempts by Russia and the separatists it backs to re-write Minsk will only lead to further violence, further destruction, and a further price that Russia will pay, as long as it continues on this destructive path and avoids diplomacy.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.