



## 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  
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Last week, we spoke about Russia's obstinacy in fueling the fighting in eastern Ukraine and obstructing progress toward a lasting and peaceful resolution of the conflict. It seems the Kremlin is more satisfied to drain Ukraine's blood and treasure, and its own, for the foreseeable future.

In the latter half of 2020, the daily levels of violence dropped significantly. However, the lack of a political solution casts a shadow over this trend and civilians in eastern Ukraine continue to be wounded or killed by explosive devices, shelling, and small arms fire. Russia and its proxies killed two and wounded five *Ukrainian Armed Forces* in January alone. Only when Russia decides it is time to end its aggressive behavior can we expect to see zero, rather than simply fewer, casualties.

Swedish Foreign Minister Linde's visit to Ukraine last week sent a strong signal that this Chairperson-in-Office (CiO) prioritizes bringing the conflict to an end.

Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine represents the most significant threat to European security in the region today. We are grateful that Sweden has rightfully made the conflict in Ukraine a key focus of its 2021 Chairpersonship.

We further urge Russia to direct its proxies to afford SMM monitors the unrestricted movement as provided for by their mandate and to cease their targeting of the Mission's technical assets, both UAVs and cameras.

In Crimea, Russian occupation authorities unjustly detained 120 Crimean Tatars to prevent them from attending a court hearing. The hearing itself resulted in 13-, 17-, and 18- year sentences for three Crimean Muslims on trumped-up charges that alleged involvement in terrorism and other dubious offenses. In reality, Russian occupation authorities prosecuted these Ukraine citizens—not for any criminal behavior—but rather for their opposition to Russia's purported annexation.

Although Russia refuses to afford the SMM, and other international monitoring groups, access to the peninsula, we continue to learn on a weekly basis of these, and other, politically motivated arrests and prosecutions. Last week, the Ukrainian NGO *Crimea SOS* released a report based on in-depth interviews of some released political prisoners from Crimea. The report documents abuses and detention conditions that their fellow political prisoners endure, including prison

guards beating, inflicting electric shocks, and staging mock executions, among other disturbing examples.

The Swedish CiO's recent comments on seeking a sustainable political solution were absolutely correct – this must be done in line with international law and the OSCE's principles and commitments, with full respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders, including Crimea and the City of Sevastopol.

There is *no* legitimacy to Russia's objection last week, which is predicated on Moscow's refusal to acknowledge the overwhelmingly-held view of the members of this Council, the United Nations, and the European Court of Human Rights: Crimea is Ukraine. The SMM's mandate, as committed to by this Permanent Council, provides the Mission with "safe and secure access throughout Ukraine;" We all know Crimea is Ukraine.

We call on Russia to release all Ukrainian citizens it has wrongfully imprisoned and to implement its Minsk commitments, starting with steps to improve security by removing all forces, hardware and matériel from eastern Ukraine.

Madam Chair, the United States fully supports Ukraine's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, including 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 Minsk-related sanctions against Russia will remain in place until Russia fully implements its Minsk commitments. The Crimea-related sanctions will remain in place until Russia returns full control of the peninsula to Ukraine.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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