



## United States Mission to the OSCE

### **Russia's Ongoing Violations in Ukraine**

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
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The United States welcomes the positive developments made during the past week following meetings of the Trilateral Contact Group and the Normandy Leaders, but emphasizes that much work remains to be done to secure full implementation of the Minsk agreements. The agreement of September 29 on the withdrawal of heavy weapons less than 100mm in caliber is an important step toward de-escalating the conflict in Ukraine. It reinforces the September 1 ceasefire, which continues to generally hold. We also welcome the fact that the sides have started to report to the Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) the serial numbers and coordinates of weapons covered by the agreement, as well as withdrawal routes and designated storage sites. SMM reports indicate some tanks have already been withdrawn and placed into storage.

Nonetheless, progress to date in Ukraine remains reversible. The information provided to the SMM thus far is not sufficient to verify that all of the weapons stipulated under the September 29 agreement will be permanently removed from the conflict zone. Such verification is essential, given that combined Russian-separatist forces violated previous pledges and have consistently denied the SMM the ability to fulfill its observation and verification mission. The original heavy weapons withdrawal stipulated in the Minsk agreements must also resume and be verified by the OSCE.

The importance of withdrawal, and the fragility of the situation, is underscored by reports just this morning that in the last 24 hours separatists fired two anti-tank missiles at a Ukrainian excavator, reportedly injuring four soldiers. The Ukrainian military has said that, despite this provocation, it will continue its withdrawal.

Mr. Chair, there must be complete transparency regarding weapons withdrawals covered by the Minsk agreements. Unless the SMM is given complete information – and unhindered access to verify it – these agreements will fail. For this reason, the SMM must have all necessary means to fulfill its mandate, and Russian-led separatist forces must finally cease the massive restrictions on SMM access.

The terms of the recent supplemental weapons withdrawal agreement place fresh demands on the SMM. New forward-deployed monitoring positions needed to monitor the ceasefire and weapons withdrawal will require new staff, as well as new technical capabilities. The United States is recruiting more monitors – up to 10 percent of the SMM's needs – and is prepared to provide technical assistance to the SMM as well. We urge all participating States to redouble their commitments to support the SMM and give it every chance of success.

Mr. Chair, it is particularly troubling that at a time when Russian leaders speak about peace in Ukraine, and have agreed to the withdrawal of some categories of weapons from the line of

conflict, Russia continues to provide sophisticated heavy weaponry to forces inside Ukraine. On September 26, the SMM observed in separatist-controlled territory a T-72 tank bearing a TOS-1 Buratino multiple launch thermobaric rocket system. The Buratino rocket system can destroy several city blocks in a single strike. The Ukrainian Ministry of Defense has confirmed it has never had such weapons in service, nor has the Buratino ever been legally exported to Ukraine. That means the Buratino system could have come from only one source: the Russian Federation. Russia's weapons have no place in the conflict zone; in fact, they have no place anywhere in Ukraine.

We regret that this is not the only way in which Russia continues to violate its Minsk commitments. Combined Russian-separatist forces have prevented the SMM from establishing some of the forward operating bases needed to effectively monitor the current ceasefire. And Russia-backed separatists have yet to grant the SMM access to open a second UAV airstrip that would provide critically needed coverage of Luhansk oblast. Russia-backed separatists delayed or denied access to the SMM no fewer than six times in the three days following the Normandy Leaders meeting in Paris on October 2. The SMM still lacks full access to the Ukrainian-Russian border, and jamming of SMM UAVs continues, despite a commitment to prevent recurrence of these issues by the Normandy Leaders.

We once again call for an end to the massive blocking of humanitarian aid in separatist-controlled territory. The obligations of the combined Russian-separatist forces are crystal clear: measure seven of the Minsk Package of Measures commits its signatories to “ensure safe access, delivery, storage, and distribution of humanitarian assistance to those in need.” We renew our objections to the ejection of UN agencies and international humanitarian organizations from the so-called “LPR.” With each passing week, the people in the conflict zone become more and more vulnerable to the approaching onset of winter. Continuing obstruction of aid is not a local technical problem; it is the result of a deliberate decision by combined Russian-separatist forces. Its cost will be measured in human life. A deeper humanitarian crisis must not be allowed to happen.

Mr. Chair, we welcome media reports earlier this week that Russian-backed separatists will not hold their planned sham elections in separatist-controlled areas. Russian representatives have stated repeatedly – both in this chamber and elsewhere – that there is no alternative to implementing the Minsk agreements. And so, we call on the Russian government to make it clear that it – like the rest of the international community – will only recognize elections held under Ukrainian law, in accordance with OSCE standards, and monitored by ODIHR.

The time for the Russian Federation to back its rhetoric with action is long overdue. We call for meaningful engagement in the Trilateral Contact Group's Political Working Group to reach agreement on the modalities of local elections in the special status zone, even if this stretches out the timeline for the February Minsk implementation plan. Russia must still withdraw its weapons and forces from Ukraine, stop interfering with the SMM's operations, and the blocking of humanitarian aid. It must allow for international monitoring of its international border with Ukraine, as it agreed over a year ago, and order its proxies to return control of the international border to Ukraine. And it is long past time for Russia to withdraw from Crimea and end its occupation there.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.