



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 Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Michele Siders
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 17, 2018

For the past four years, this Council has borne witness to Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Four years into the fighting, Russia has failed to keep even the most basic of the agreements reached in Minsk. Russia has failed to respect the line of contact, leading incursions since 2014 that have claimed hundreds of square kilometers for its proxies in eastern Ukraine. Russia has failed to respect the ceasefire, making and breaking countless truces. Russia has failed to withdraw heavy weapons, consistently deploying – and firing – them in proscribed areas. And Russia has failed to uphold the mandate of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM), permitting – if not instructing – its forces to deny, detain, threaten, and even shoot at monitors, their vehicles, and their cameras and drones. Russia's aggression has cost over 10,300 lives, wounded an estimated 25,000 more, and displaced up to two million people.

The United States and over thirty other participating States have further warned that the fighting puts critical infrastructure like the Donetsk Filtration Station (DFS) in jeopardy, leaving the Donbas at heightened risk for an environmental catastrophe. We are deeply concerned that on May 14, this critical water facility once again came under fire on the same day a bullet passed dangerously close to the head of an SMM monitor. Russia started this conflict and continues to fuel it, so Moscow is ultimately to blame for the humanitarian crisis in the Donbas. However, it is the responsibility of both sides to ensure that the unarmed civilian employees of DFS – as well as the SMM monitors who facilitate their work – are protected. We call on Russia-led forces and Ukrainian Armed Forces to immediately work toward disengagement from the Donetsk Filtration Station and other critical civilian infrastructure sites.

Mr. Chair, the Russian Federation continues to arm, train, lead, and fight alongside forces in eastern Ukraine. We remind the Permanent Council that Russia has never accounted for the presence of uniformed Russian soldiers, as reported by the SMM. Russia has never explained the presence of Russian weapon systems that are not, and have never been, a part of Ukraine's arsenal. As reported by the SMM, these include the TOS-1 Buratino Multiple

Launch Rocket System, the Zhytel R-330 jamming station, and the Orlan-10 drone. Nor has Russia ever acknowledged the tens of thousands of persons in military-style dress, whom the OSCE Border Observation Mission has seen cross into Russia-controlled parts of Ukraine. Russia has noted that OSCE observers did not witness members of its armed forces carrying weapons across the border in plain sight, yet Russian soldiers have been observed bearing weapons in the conflict zone. Last week Russia sent yet another so-called “aid convoy” across the border into eastern Ukraine, and continued to deny access to OSCE observers and Ukrainian customs officials to inspect it. If these are humanitarian shipments, as Russia claims, why are SMM monitors not allowed to inspect them? And why are they not coordinated through an international mechanism, as the Minsk agreements stipulate? It’s clear that Russia’s rhetoric is simply an attempt to distract from its lack of compliance with the Minsk agreements.

Mr. Chair, the fact remains that this conflict will only be resolved if Russia makes the decision to remove its forces from the territory of Ukraine, and allows a genuine international security presence to enter. As U.S. Special Representative for Ukraine Negotiations Kurt Volker noted in a briefing with the U.S. Helsinki Commission last week, an internationally mandated peacekeeping force under a UN mandate would establish the conditions for the peaceful resolution of the conflict. It would also alleviate the suffering of the millions of people affected by the conflict. This peacekeeping force would be responsible for security within the conflict area, and would oversee the cantonment of heavy weapons. And it would have to establish control – not closure – of the international border between Ukraine and Russia in areas outside of Ukrainian government control. Only then would the conditions be ripe to hold local elections and ensure other political steps under the Minsk agreements are fully implemented.

Russia’s attempted annexation of the Crimean peninsula constitutes another contravention of Russia’s OSCE commitments. Sanctions announced on May 14 by the European Union against five individuals for organizing Russia’s recent presidential elections in Crimea – an action that demonstrated Russia’s contempt for Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity – were fully warranted. Along with the EU, the United States condemns the opening of a bridge connecting Russia to Crimea without the agreement of the Ukrainian government. The bridge represents not just an attempt by Russia to solidify its unlawful seizure and occupation of Crimea; it also impedes navigation and the delivery of goods to people in Ukraine. In 2016, the United States sanctioned several companies involved in its construction.

Mr. Chair, tomorrow, 74 years will have passed since the Soviet government ordered the mass deportation of over 230,000 Crimean Tatars from their historic homeland. We recall that last year, Russian security forces stepped up their repressive behavior on the peninsula on the anniversary of this tragedy, detaining Crimean Tatars to prevent them from taking part in services to commemorate the deportations. The United States reminds the Russian Federation of its legal obligations as occupying authority to respect the rights of the Crimean Tatars – and all other Ukrainians – to exercise their right to peaceful assembly and free expression on the peninsula.

We again note our concern about the health of Volodymyr Balukh, who remains on hunger strike in prison while facing trial on politically-motivated charges. His plight is far from the

2

only cause for concern. Yet, Russia tries to prevent the world from learning the extent of its repression in Crimea. This week, the Crimea Human Rights Group was notified that Russian censors plan to block access to its website, if it does not remove information documenting Russia's illegal practice of conscripting Crimean residents into the Russian army.

Russia's aggression and conduct in Ukraine undermines the core principles and commitments of the OSCE, as well as our collective security. Let me reiterate that the United States fully supports Ukraine's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. We do not, nor will we ever, recognize Russia's purported annexation of Crimea. Crimea-related sanctions on Russia will remain in place until Russia returns full control of the peninsula to Ukraine. We join our European and other partners in restating that our sanctions against Russia for its aggression in eastern Ukraine will remain until Russia fully implements its commitments under the Minsk agreements.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.