



## United States Mission to the OSCE

### **On the Russian-Combined Separatist Forces' Offensive near Svitlodarsk**

As delivered by U.S. Ambassador Daniel B. Baer  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
December 20, 2016

The United States expresses its deep concern over the offensive combined Russian-separatist forces launched on Sunday, December 18, in what appears to have been a failed attempt to seize territory in strategic areas outside the town of Svitlodarsk, near separatist-held Debaltseve. This brazen contravention of Russia's commitments under the Minsk Agreements is an issue of the utmost concern to the OSCE, and we agree with Ukraine that there should have been a special Permanent Council meeting called to address it.

The Ukrainian Ministry of Defense reported that on December 18, 150 combined Russian-separatist military personnel, supported by an artillery battery, attempted to encircle Ukrainian Armed Forces positions along the line of contact outside of Svitlodarsk. Combined Russian-separatist forces targeted areas to the rear of Ukrainian positions, firing artillery five to six kilometers into government-controlled territory, well past the line of contact. Six Ukrainian soldiers were killed repulsing the attack and many more were wounded. An estimated 20 to 30 combined Russian-separatist forces were killed in the failed offensive. From its position in separatist-held Debaltseve, the SMM recorded multiple outgoing Grad multiple-launch-rocket-system rounds on December 18 and 19. The SMM also spotted military-style trucks driving from separatist-held Debaltseve toward the line of contact.

This Russian-separatist attack is clearly prohibited by Russia's commitments under the Minsk Agreements. It is not an isolated action, but a deliberate effort to seize further territory. This is the fourth major attempt by combined Russian-separatist forces to seize territory beyond the Line of Contact that was established when Russia and the separatists it backs signed the September 19, 2014, Minsk Memorandum. Since signing, combined Russian-separatist forces have violated that agreement multiple times including in Debaltseve in February 2015, Marynka in June 2015, and Svitlodarsk in June 2016 and again in the last few days. This latest attack at Svitlodarsk is a continuation of this disturbing pattern and a deadly reminder of Russia's disregard for its commitments under the Minsk Agreements.

Russia must undo the damage it has done immediately, and immediately exercise its influence over the separatists to deescalate the conflict, withdraw heavy weapons from the contact line, and enable full and unfettered monitoring by the SMM throughout the entirety of Ukraine.

As we approach the holiday season, it is all the more important that we work to reestablish a durable and effective ceasefire, ensure the residents of Donbas receive the humanitarian assistance they so desperately need, and implement confidence-building measures such as disengagement and prisoner exchanges. We fully support the efforts of the Trilateral Contact Group to negotiate the terms of a holiday ceasefire recommitment. We applaud Ukraine's December 15 announcement that it intends to unilaterally release 15 detainees. We urge Russia and the separatists it influences to respond in kind: cease all attacks, including at the disengagement zone of Stanytsia Luhanska; allow humanitarian aid to flow unimpeded into separatist-controlled territories; and negotiate the release of detainees on the "all for all" principle enshrined in the Minsk Agreements.

In closing, we reiterate that the sanctions against the Russian Federation will remain in place until Russia fully implements its Minsk commitments – commitments that Russia has egregiously violated this very week. We also welcome the adoption by the UN General Assembly of a Resolution on human rights in Russian-occupied Crimea, and we recall that our sanctions related to our sanctions related to the Russian Federation's attempted annexation will remain until Russia returns this territory to Ukraine.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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