



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, a.i. Harry Kamian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
December 21, 2017

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ambassador Apakan, let me join my colleagues around the table in expressing our sincere appreciation for your timely report on the deteriorating security situation on the ground – especially the grave consequences for civilians and our monitors stemming from the Russian Federation's decision to unilaterally withdraw from the JCCC (Joint Center for Control and Coordination), and the impact that this decision will have on the security situation there, including the impact on our monitors.

Mr. Chair, the United States is deeply troubled by the Russian Federation's announced withdrawal from the JCCC. We share your concern regarding the lack of peace on the ground, but I wonder whether that view, and the concern that you expressed, is shared equally by all participating States in this room. Why is it, Mr. Chair, that Russia has unilaterally abandoned a mechanism that has proved instrumental in negotiating local ceasefires? Despite its limited influence, the JCCC was a bilateral channel that negotiated ceasefires to allow workers to repair infrastructure and aid civilians. As Ambassador Apakan clearly stated, the SMM relied on the JCCC to follow up on harassment and threats made to its monitors. The conclusion drawn from this action is clear: the Russian Federation seeks to absolve itself of the incendiary role it plays in the Ukrainian conflict. By unilaterally withdrawing from the JCCC, Russia effectively renders it ineffective and exposes civilians and our SMM monitors to increased danger. As Ambassador Apakan noted, the JCCC has a responsibility to contribute to the security and safety of the SMM monitors. These are our monitors. We join many other voices in calling on Russia to put an end to the attacks in eastern Ukraine and restore the JCCC immediately. Ambassador Apakan, you can continue to count on the United States' steadfast support in your efforts to ensure the safety and security of the monitors on the ground.

Mr. Chair, we find it particularly striking that, on the same day that Russia withdrew from the JCCC, its forces bombarded the town of Novoluhanske with rockets, wounding eight civilians and damaging dozens of houses, a school, and a playground. The fighting in the Donbas continues to worsen and has reached a level similar to that experienced in January and February of 2017. The December 13 SMM weekly report noted that use of weapons proscribed by the Minsk agreements had doubled over the past week.

Unfortunately, reports of violence of this magnitude are so common that the gravity of the situation in the Donbas is virtually lost. There are thousands of explosions daily from weapon systems that, upon impact, kill or maim anyone within 50 meters of the blast site, in addition to damaging critical civilian infrastructure. Shells again landed dangerously close to pipes carrying poisonous chlorine gas at the Donetsk Filtration Station on December 17.

Mr. Chair, regrettably, we see no signs that Russia and its proxies are interested in protecting vulnerable infrastructure, which serves civilians on both sides of the line of contact. We hear reports of Russia-led tank formations spotted in non-government controlled areas that are larger than the armored forces of many of the States seated here today. Recall that, because the SMM can only capture a fraction of the incidents, the real picture is likely much more severe. Civilians are killed and wounded regularly, simply because they cannot leave the area. And the situation is deteriorating.

While the security situation is indeed dire, a path forward exists. The Minsk agreements, in their totality, form the basis of a peaceful settlement in the Donbas. Russia is a party to the agreements, yet remains unwilling to take the first steps in creating the conditions for the implementation of the agreements. Until it does, the conflict will continue.

As Ambassador Apakan alluded to, Mr. Chair, in all of this our SMM monitors remain exposed, and increasingly so. The United States calls upon the Russian Federation and its proxies to stop immediately their restriction of, and interference with, SMM patrols, equipment, and monitoring capabilities. In addition, reports of threats to monitors by so-called “DPR” and “LPR” militants continue. On December 6, two SMM monitors were forcibly detained and their phones confiscated by plain-clothed, so-called “DPR” authorities. Two hours later the monitors were released, with no clear reasons for their detention. These actions must end, Mr. Chair, and we call on the Russian Federation and its proxies in eastern Ukraine to cease these threats and provide for full, free, and safe access for the SMM to fully fulfill its mandate.

Mr. Chair, the United States condemns the arrest and detention of 70 Crimean Tatar activists who were targeted for staging peaceful, individual demonstrations across multiple locations in the Russia-occupied Crimean peninsula. On December 18, trials began for 65 of them. The actions of the Russian occupation authorities appear designed to punish and intimidate anyone who speaks out against the occupation. The United States once again calls upon Russia to end its repressive actions in occupied Crimea and return control of Crimea to Ukraine.

In closing, Mr. Chair, let me stress: 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. And 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.

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