



United States Mission to the OSCE

Ongoing Violations of OSCE Principles and Commitments by the Russian Federation and the Situation in Ukraine

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the Chairmanship for calling this Special meeting of the Permanent Council at this critical moment, and to thank Ambassador Apakan and Ambassador Tagliavini for their briefings. I would also like to extend our thanks to Ambassador Tagliavini for her tireless efforts to support the signatories of the Minsk Protocol and agreement in the implementation of the commitments they made in September. Ambassador Tagliavini, we commend you for your determination to bring peace in the face of Russian intransigence. Ambassador Apakan, we thank you, and indeed all of those working as part of the Special Monitoring Mission, for your efforts to monitor the ceasefire, despite the dangerous circumstances prevailing in many areas under separatist control in eastern Ukraine.

Colleagues, it is worth spending just a few minutes to review how we got to today. In April of last year, following Russia's occupation and attempted annexation of Crimea, Russia-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine began seizing and occupying government buildings, as had transpired in Crimea. The Government of Ukraine responded as any sovereign government would; it pressed back against the armed groups illegally operating on its territory. Despite some initial setbacks, the government's forces made gains against the separatists over the next several months until, in August, it began to look as though the government's security forces would secure the upper hand against the separatists. Meanwhile, Russia took every opportunity to destabilize the situation both by supporting the separatists with personnel, training, materiel, and financing as well as by deploying a massive build-up of Russia military forces at its border with Ukraine.

At this stage, Russia began to elevate the level of its interference in the conflict by actively deploying Russian military units in Ukraine. Satellite imagery on August 26 showed Russian combat units southeast of Donetsk, on Ukrainian territory. That same day, Ukrainian forces detained regular Russian Army personnel from the 9th brigade near Luhansk. Russia fired Grad rockets from inside Russia at Ukrainian positions in Novoazovsk, and then attacked with two columns of Russian armored vehicles and tanks.

The week after this armed intervention and escalation by Russia, in September, Presidents Poroshenko and Putin agreed to a ceasefire and to address the crisis through the September 5 Minsk Protocol – followed by a plan for implementing certain elements of the ceasefire, as elaborated in the September 19 Minsk Memorandum. The Minsk agreements – signed by

representatives of Ukraine, Russia, the separatists, and Ambassador Tagliavini – are the best foundation for a peaceful resolution to the crisis. The sides made many common commitments in the agreements, including the commitment to respect an immediate ceasefire. The commitment to allow the OSCE to monitor the Russian-Ukrainian border with the creation of security zones in the border regions of Ukraine and the Russian Federation – a commitment the importance of which recent events have proved. The commitment to immediate release of all hostages. And the September 19 Minsk Memorandum also established an agreed ceasefire line and called for the withdrawal of heavy weapons from within 15 kilometers of that line.

In the months since the sides made these agreements in Minsk, we have consistently seen the Ukrainian side make good faith efforts to implement the agreements and build a peaceful resolution to the crisis. In contrast, Russia and the separatists have stymied every attempt by the Ukrainian side and the international community to resolve this crisis peacefully. There has been near constant shelling in recent days, with hundreds of rockets and other heavy weapons fired. If Russia were not sending heavy weapons across the border this violence would not be happening. Instead of facilitating and implementing the Minsk agreement, Russia and the separatists it backs have pushed to expand their area of control beyond the agreed ceasefire line. For example, some of the heaviest fighting we have seen in recent days has been caused by separatist attempts to wrest control of the village of Pisky from government forces. We have also seen heavy shelling in Debaltseve. It is not a coincidence that, as Ambassador Apakan has related again today, violations of the ceasefire have centered around four points of strategic value held by the Ukrainian government. It is all well and good to call on all sides to observe the ceasefire, but we must all also recognize that when you and I agree to a pact of non-violence, and you try to strangle me, we don't have equal culpability if I resist your violent attack.

Now that Ukraine is again actively defending its territory, Russia is cynically calling for a new peace plan and a renegotiated ceasefire. The agreed parameters of the ceasefire already exist. What we need is not a new agreement. What we need is serious implementation of the Minsk agreement by Russia and the separatists it backs: to respect the ceasefire that has already been agreed; to allow the OSCE to monitor the entire length of Russia's border with Ukraine; and to release all hostages and illegally detained persons, including Nadia Savchenko and Oleg Sentsov, who are being held inside Russia. We don't need any new agreements. We need Russia to honor the agreements it has already made.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.