



United States Mission to the OSCE

Special Session: Ensuring Security and Stability in the OSCE Region in Light of Developments with Respect to Ukraine

As prepared for delivery by Deputy Assistant Secretary for European Affairs
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Russia's ongoing aggression in eastern Ukraine violates this organization's core principles and has resulted in the loss of over 10,000 lives – 2,800 of which are civilians. We are deeply disturbed by the escalating violence. The Special Monitoring Mission has documented twice as many ceasefire violations this year compared to the same period last year -- the majority of which originate from territory not controlled by the government of Ukraine. An increase in the use of heavy weapons, including multiple-launch rocket systems and artillery, has made the fighting more deadly. So far this year, the rates of both civilian and Ukrainian military deaths have both doubled over the same period last year. The so-called "separatists" that Russia arms, trains, leads and fights alongside regularly target civilian infrastructure and engage in a sustained campaign of attacks and intimidation of OSCE monitors.

As Secretary Tillerson said in his June 14 testimony to Congress, the United States remains committed to the Minsk agreements, but we are not satisfied with the progress of implementation. As we have clearly stated -- both bilaterally and here in the OSCE -- Russia must take the next steps on security. We once again call on Russia to stop the violence and fully implement its Minsk commitments. Ukraine cannot be expected to make progress on the political elements of Minsk until there is sustained quiet on the line, withdrawal of heavy weapons, and unimpeded access for OSCE monitors, including up to Ukraine's internationally recognized border with Russia. As Secretary Tillerson said, Ukraine-related sanctions on Russia will remain in place until Moscow fully implements the Minsk agreements. Our separate, Crimea-related sanctions will also remain in place until the peninsula is returned to Ukraine.

The OSCE has played a critical role in addressing the ongoing situation in Ukraine. I commend the work of the courageous men and women who participate in the OSCE's Special Monitoring Mission and the Observation Mission at the two Russian checkpoints of Gukovo and Donetsk. This work is critical and the OSCE serves an important function as the eyes and ear of the international community, though I should note that the Mission remains limited to conducting operations at only two out of eleven checkpoints along the border between Russia and separatist-held Ukraine. Even within those two crossing points, OSCE observers are severely restricted by the Russian authorities.

The United States was shocked and deeply saddened by the death of a U.S. citizen serving as a paramedic with the SMM, when his vehicle struck an explosive in so-called “separatist-” controlled territory in eastern Ukraine. This death underscores the increasingly dangerous conditions under which these courageous monitors work, including access restrictions, threats, and harassment. There have been dozens of security incidents this year alone in which SMM monitors have been threatened, harassed, and even fired upon by Russian-led separatist. While States through the OSCE region have roundly spoken out in defense of our monitors, Russia has not once this year condemned such actions. This is categorically unacceptable. We owe it to these brave men and women to ensure the safest and securest conditions possible. We await the results of the SMM’s internal investigation, and the start of the external investigation.

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. Russia has failed to respect the basic principles of international law, the Helsinki Final Act, and other OSCE commitments. Russia’s aggression in Ukraine has reminded us that the OSCE must continue to develop tools to enable the international community to rapidly respond to crises and security challenges.