



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Address by the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine and in the Trilateral Contact Group, Amb. Heidi Grau and the Chief Monitor of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine

As delivered by Ambassador James S. Gilmore III
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 9, 2020

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

As always, it is a pleasure to welcome Ambassadors Çevik and Grau back to the Permanent Council. We are grateful for your continued efforts to bring peace to Ukraine. In a time of unprecedented uncertainty, your Mission has ably maintained the core functions of its mandate.

We know this has not been easy. Even as you have worked to meet the already challenging demands of daily monitoring activities, you have faced additional restrictions placed on the Mission by Russia and its proxies. Under the guise of the pandemic, and despite the stringent and effective protocols you implemented to ensure the safety of the monitors and local communities, Russia-led forces have intentionally obstructed SMM operations. These restrictions on their movement unnecessarily isolated monitors working in Russia-controlled territory, further taxing the entire operation. We understand the urgency of replenishing personnel behind the *Line of Contact*, and you have the support of the United States and many others in this Council, behind your efforts to place monitors where you need them.

Ensuring the SMM's movement should be a priority for all the participating States. Yet Russia-led forces continue to harass monitors and delay or block their movements. Between April and June, the SMM's movement was restricted 273 times; all but 11 of these instances occurred in Russia-controlled territory. The Mission has demonstrated its ability to ensure the health and the

safety of the monitors and local communities and this should not be used as an excuse to obstruct its operations.

You have also reported over 150 instances of signal interference with mission UAVs, which resulted in the loss or damage of five mini-UAVs. Since June 1, 2020, the Mission has reported three instances in which SMM cameras were targeted by Russia-led forces and either damaged or destroyed. The UAVs and cameras are an integral component of the SMM's operations, particularly in a period in which the Mission is operating at reduced staffing levels. Are my Russian colleagues not embarrassed that their proxy forces week after week engage in this type of petty vandalism, destroying this organization's property, which is paid for by the members of this council? One would think that, frankly, basic self-respect would compel them to put a stop to this behavior.

As you note in your report, ceasefire violations continued without pause, despite the Normandy leaders' commitment to a full and comprehensive implementation of the ceasefire in Paris in December 2019. Between April and June, the SMM recorded a daily average of 636 ceasefire violations and a total of 1,374 ceasefire violations attributable to weapons that should have been withdrawn in accordance with the Minsk agreements, including artillery and mortars. Russia's proxies openly displayed some of these weapons during their Victory Day parades in Donetsk and Luhansk cities on June 24 – the same day as the parade in Moscow.

This volatile environment has resulted in 92 civilian casualties, as of June 22, including 14 fatalities, per the UN's Human Rights Monitoring Mission. As always, it is the civilians on both sides of the *Line of Contact* in the Donbas who pay the biggest price for the Russian government's efforts to destabilize Ukraine and weaken European security.

Ambassador Çevik, we are concerned about a number of recent serious incidents in which Monitors were exposed to small arms fire or explosions close to their positions. The safety and security of SMM monitors should be the highest priority of all participating States, and we commend your ongoing efforts to ensure their well-being. These reports today make the United States wonder whether finally, at last, we are beginning to see the process of a rejection of the SMM project of the OSCE and the mandate given by the member States

Ambassador Grau, we recognize that yours is not an easy job, and we appreciate your efforts to guide these complex discussions. We heard your comments today that you were seriously concerned about the situation that we are seeing in Ukraine. We applaud Kyiv's continued commitment to reaching a peaceful conclusion to this terrible conflict and note its recently enhanced Trilateral Contact Group representation.

Russia, however, continues its longstanding disinformation campaign by repeating the same tired narrative that Ukraine is to blame for a lack of progress at the TCG. Russia's leaders and representatives insist Ukraine negotiate directly with Russia's proxies, while pretending Moscow is not party to the conflict it instigated and continues to fuel. The discussions here at the Permanent Council, and the position of my Russian colleague, appears to be that of a Bertolt Brecht comedic opera. We hear the songs over and over, but we are not persuaded by the play. We know that Russia thinks that it can hide behind the curtain, but we see you. As a signatory to the Minsk agreements and a party to this conflict, Russia should match Ukraine's commitment to peace. It's time for that. Ambassador Grau, we encourage you to continue your strong efforts to spur progress.

Mr. Chairman, the United States remains concerned by Russia's militarization of Crimea. So let's say a few words about Crimea this morning. Moscow has transferred nuclear-capable aircraft and missiles, other weapons, ammunition, and military personnel to Crimea and has increased its military presence in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, including the Kerch Strait. This is widely known. It has conscripted nearly 24,000 young Crimeans into the Russian Armed Forces. It is clear that Russia's conscriptions of residents of Crimea into its armed forces are inconsistent with international humanitarian law applicable to belligerent occupation.

We encourage all delegations to read the interim report of the UN Secretary General on Crimea, which was released late last week and highlights reports of widespread torture perpetrated with impunity by occupation authorities, as well as serious restrictions on civil society, the press, and online speech. We are troubled by the news that on July 7 occupation authorities conducted another round of mass raids on the homes of Crimean Tatars in multiple cities across the peninsula. During these raids, seven Crimean Tatar activists were arrested, all apparently on the usual pretext of "terrorism" charges brought in retaliation for their opposition to Russia's occupation.

Russian occupation forces trample on the rights of Crimean Tatars and other Ukrainians. Moscow signals its contempt for Ukraine's sovereignty under international law, most recently by orchestrating voting in Ukrainian territory for the recent Russian constitutional plebiscite. We are concerned by multiple reports of attempts to coerce Crimean Tatar political prisoners into voting in the plebiscite.

It is time for Russia to end the conflict in Ukraine, cease its occupation of Crimea, and withdraw its forces and materiel from eastern Ukraine and Crimea.

Mr. Chairman, the United States fully supports Ukraine's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, including its territorial waters. We do not, nor will we ever, recognize Russia's purported annexation of Crimea. We call on Russia to release all Ukrainians it has unjustly imprisoned. We join our European and other partners in affirming that our Minsk-related sanctions against Russia will remain in place until Russia fully implements its Minsk commitments. The Crimea-related sanctions will remain in place until Russia returns full control of the peninsula to Ukraine.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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