



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 Ambassador James S. Gilmore III
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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Last week, we heard from Ambassadors Grau and Cevik. We strongly value the unbiased views of the situation on the ground in eastern Ukraine and of discussions in the *Trilateral Contact Group*, backed by their own deep experience.

Ambassadors Grau and Cevik painted for us a vivid and detailed picture. The path forward to a long-lasting, sustainable peace is clear: build upon the reduced fighting on the ground and increase confidence step by step through demining, exchanging detainees, and establishing new entry-exit crossing points and disengagement areas, to build some normalcy into the situation so that we can begin to move forward to the next step.

We find ourselves in a moment of real opportunity here. The implementation of the additional measures to strengthen the ceasefire has brought the civilian populations of eastern Ukraine a much-needed respite from the chaos and suffering they have endured since Russia instigated this conflict in 2014.

But the communities remain at risk, whether from explosive ordnance or from the dangers they face in trying to meet the everyday needs that's only available on ... the other side of the *Line of Contact*. Elderly citizens, children, and other vulnerable groups endure lengthy delays at entry-exit crossing points, in some cases days or weeks. As winter approaches, some may even die of exposure because of such delays. I recall in the last winter the many videos and reports that we all saw vividly during those winter months.

The planned openings by November 10 of entry-exit crossing points in Luhansk can alleviate the suffering of civilians who need to traverse the *Line of Contact*. However, new crossing points will not improve the situation if no one is permitted to cross. We call upon Russia to instruct its proxies to allow these Ukrainian civilians to move freely across the *Line of Contact*.

Russia's proxies also obstruct the SMM from crossing the *Line of Contact* while on patrol and even block the monitors from freely moving between the parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions under Russia's control. I recall that Ambassador Cevik said many times that sometimes he feels that he has three different SMM missions, because of the obstruction he is facing carrying out his mission. We do not accept the current situation as a "new normal." We call on Russia to honor its commitments and allow the SMM to fulfill its mandate throughout all of Ukraine, as the 57 countries of this Organization have agreed to and have empowered.

Now the fact is that Russia and its proxies are blocking all roads to progress in the *Trilateral Contact Group*. As the situation in eastern Ukraine remains quiet, now is the time for Russia to match the political will shown by Ukraine. It is time for Russia to end its obstructionism.

As Ambassador Grau noted in her address last week, linking political pre-conditions to non-related topics is just a way of derailing the *Trilateral Contact Group* negotiations. I think we would all like to see Russia demonstrating a genuine effort to move the ball on concrete deliverables that will have a real, positive impact on the people of eastern Ukraine. As this is developed the Contact Group is taking on an increasingly important role in the next step of the settlement process. Moscow always has claimed to care about the people living in eastern Ukraine; and we certainly believe all the people of eastern Ukraine deserve to live in peace and travel freely in their own country, which is Ukraine.

The fact is the communities of eastern Ukraine suffer at the hands of Russia and its proxies. And in Russia-occupied Crimea, authorities systematically abuse Crimean Tatars, ethnic Ukrainians and others who oppose the occupation, subjecting them to harassment, arrest, and detention for dissent or for exercising freedom of religion or belief or their right to peaceful assembly. Is this what Ukraine is supposed to look like in some Russian future? I think it would be rejected. Russia currently holds more than 80 Ukrainian political prisoners in jails and prisons in Russia and Crimea. We urge Russia to return them to their homes and their families.

As part of its broader efforts to subdue its sovereign neighbor, Russia also continues to forcibly conscript Ukrainian citizens residing in Crimea.

Credible NGOs have reported increased efforts by Russia to conscript Crimean youth into its military through establishing educational institutions that provide combat training to Crimean children. Training for military service in Russia's armed forces is the institutions' stated aim, and the institutions are incorporated into Russia's "military-patriotic" education system. We call on Russia to immediately cease such efforts to indoctrinate Crimean children and cease conscripting residents of Crimea into its military. Russia has conscripted over 24,000 Crimean residents into the *Russian Armed Forces* since 2015, which, as we have repeatedly stated in this Council, is inconsistent with international humanitarian law.

Mr. Chair, the United States fully supports Ukraine's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, including its territorial waters. As we have said repeatedly in this Permanent Council, we do not, nor will we ever, recognize Russia's purported annexation of Crimea. We join our European and other partners in affirming 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, which will underscore the commitment of this Organization to the Helsinki Final Act and the Helsinki Accords.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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