



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Chief Monitor of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, Ambassador Ertugrul Apakan

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
April 23, 2015

Ambassador Apakan, a warm welcome back to the Permanent Council. Thank you for your detailed report, and thank you for the vital work that you and your team are doing.

Your visit to the Permanent Council comes at a critical time in the crisis in and around Ukraine. Violence continues to flare at hotspots along the contact line, most notably near the Donetsk airport and in Shyrokyne, where the separatists have deployed main battle tanks against government forces.

These attacks are a blatant violation of the ceasefire agreed in the February 12 Package of Measures and threaten efforts to resolve the crisis peacefully.

Russia, and the separatists it backs, must stop their attacks, respect the ceasefire, and withdraw all proscribed weapons from the contact line.

In this critical moment, we urge the immediate establishment of the Working Groups called for in the February 12 Package of Measures. As we heard last week, all three members of the Trilateral Contact Group have identified their representatives in the four working groups; they should all meet without delay.

Ambassador Apakan, we welcome the SMM's determination in the face of this escalation of violence. From mediating local ceasefires to facilitating joint de-mining exercises, the SMM has been creative in its efforts to promote peace. We encourage you and your team to continue this work, taking advantage of whatever opportunities present themselves to build trust and confidence, while continuing to ensure the safety and security of the monitors. In particular, we support your efforts to establish demilitarized zones around all hotspots, and encourage the sides to withdraw all weapons from these areas – including weapons that are smaller than 100 mm. Such demilitarized zones would strengthen the prospects for peace.

One of the central components of your mandate is that the SMM is to be granted full access throughout the entire territory of Ukraine. Simply put, the SMM cannot do its job unless it can send monitors wherever it wants within Ukraine, whenever it wants, without any prior notification to anyone and without escort. That's why I want to thank you for making clear in your reports the access restrictions your mission faces on a regular basis.

Your reports have made two things clear.

First, despite an often-repeated general policy by the Government of Ukraine that the SMM should have free and unfettered access, your teams occasionally encounter local commanders that delay, or occasionally block, access through checkpoints. This needs to stop.

Second, and much more serious, Russia-backed separatists enforce a systematic policy of preventing the SMM from freely accessing enormous tracts of territory under their control. The map you have begun to include in the SMM weekly reports illustrates this unacceptable state of affairs. The Russia-backed separatists must allow the SMM full and unfettered access throughout the territory they control, especially along the border with Russia.

The SMM should also have free and unfettered access to Crimea. We urge Russia, as the occupying power, to allow the SMM to monitor the situation there, particularly in light of the serious concerns that many around this table have expressed regarding the deteriorating human rights situation there.

Along with unfettered access, the safety and security of the SMM monitors are of paramount importance. Any threat directed against any monitor is unacceptable. Equally unacceptable are situations where the monitors are endangered by shelling. The best way to ensure the monitors' safety and security would be for the Russia-backed separatists to respect the ceasefire and withdraw their heavy weapons from the contact line.

During both the presidential and parliamentary elections in Ukraine last year, the SMM played an important role supporting ODIHR's election observation efforts. We hope the SMM will provide ODIHR with even greater assistance as it prepares to observe, at the invitation of the Government of Ukraine, the local elections as called for in the February 12 Package of Measures.

Ambassador Apakan, I want to reiterate our full support for the SMM's mission. The United States provides 50 monitors – the largest number of any participating State – and we are ready to increase that number in response to requests from you to field more than 500 monitors in total, and we have heard your request to raise [the number of monitors] to 600 at this juncture. Of course, we will need – all 57 of us – to provide additional resources, especially since Russia blocked more robust funding last month, leaving the SMM underfunded, even at the 500 monitor level.

In addition to monitors, the United States has also seconded a Planning and Coordination Officer at the SMM Headquarters in Kyiv, and we are prepared to second more specialists, as posts become available. To date, the United States has provided extra-budgetary funding of approximately 4.5 million Euro and assessed contributions of approximately 11.5 million Euro towards SMM operations. Our wholehearted support of the SMM reflects our belief in your mission and our support for your work.

Mr. Chair, Ambassador Apakan, in light of the SMM's valiant efforts and successes, it is disappointing that I must also share with colleagues the following:

- Combined Russian-separatist forces continue to violate the terms of the Package of Measures.
- Combined Russian-separatist forces maintain a sizable number of artillery pieces and multiple rocket launchers within areas prohibited under the Minsk agreements.

- The Russian military has deployed additional air defense systems into eastern Ukraine and moved several of these nearer the front lines. This is the highest amount of Russian air defense equipment in eastern Ukraine since August.
- Russian and separatist forces also have a large concentration of command and control equipment in eastern Ukraine.
- Combined Russian-separatist forces have been conducting increasingly complex training in eastern Ukraine. The increasingly complex nature of this training leaves no doubt that Russia is involved in the training. The training has also incorporated Russian UAVs, an unmistakable sign of Russia's presence.
- Russia is also building up its forces along its border with Ukraine. After maintaining a relatively steady presence along the border, Russia is sending additional units there. These forces will give Russia its largest presence on the border since October 2014.
- Russia has also redeployed military elements near Belgorod, opposite Kharkiv.
- Russia has continued to ship heavy weapons into eastern Ukraine since the ceasefire on 15 February.

Despite our strong support for your mission, Mr. Ambassador, one thing remains painfully clear: notwithstanding the SMM's efforts, if peace is actually to be achieved, the decisive actions are Russia's to take.

The fighting will not cease until Russia and the separatists respect the ceasefire, withdraw heavy weapons, and remove all Russian military forces from Ukraine.

The conflict will not end until Russia and the separatists allow international monitoring along both sides of the border, release all Ukrainian hostages, and fully respect Ukrainian sovereignty, including in the provision of humanitarian aid.

This crisis in European security will not be resolved until Russia stops violating the territorial integrity of its neighbor, respects the political independence of Ukraine, and fully withdraws from Crimea.

Thank you again, Ambassador Apakan, for briefing us today. We reiterate our call for Russia and the separatists to go back to implement the commitments they have made in the Minsk agreements, we urge all participating States to redouble their commitment to ensure that the SMM has the resources and monitors it needs to fulfill its mandate, and we echo your call for the two sides to "embrace a good chance for peace" in eastern Ukraine.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.