

## **Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

### **Subcommittee on Europe and Regional Security Cooperation**

#### **Hearing**

#### **“Five Years After the Revolution of Dignity: Ukraine's Progress/Russia's Malign Activities”**

**June 18, 2019**

#### **Special Representative for Ukraine Negotiations Kurt Volker**

Thank you Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Shaheen, and members of the Committee for calling today’s hearing. I am happy to have the opportunity to talk about the state of negotiations with Russia to end the fighting in eastern Ukraine and take an important step toward restoring Ukraine’s territorial integrity. I had the honor of being in Ukraine last month as part of a U.S. presidential delegation led by the Secretary of Energy Rick Perry, and including the United States Ambassador to the European Union, Gordon Sondland, for the inauguration of President Zelenskyy. Senator Ron Johnson joined us in Kyiv for the inauguration, reflecting his staunch support for Ukraine.

The United States’ support for Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity is unwavering. Russia’s aggression and efforts to undermine Ukraine continue, but Ukraine is stronger, more united, more cohesive, and more resilient than ever before, and with our support, those trends will continue.

We are deeply concerned about the ongoing five-year old conflict in eastern Ukraine. Unfortunately, the fighting continues unabated, and Ukrainian soldiers are still being killed nearly every week. The conflict is a humanitarian tragedy for the residents of the Donbas, with around 13,000 people killed, 40,000 injured, millions displaced, and untold damage to civilian infrastructure. The arbitrary separation created by Russia’s invasion and installation of their artificial political proxies has caused needless suffering, divided families and communities, and damaged vital health and social infrastructure, businesses, and supply lines. In short, Russia has created one of the worst humanitarian crises in Europe since the wars in the Balkans in the 1990s. This suffering is a direct result of Russia’s aggression and will end only when Russia withdraws its military and security forces from Ukraine, and implements the Minsk agreements – which remain the best vehicle for achieving peace through the reintegration of the currently Russia-controlled areas in the east.

Russia, however, remains the primary obstacle to implementing the Minsk agreements. Ukraine has done what it can to implement the agreements. Ukraine passed legislation that would provide amnesty for people who committed crimes as part of the conflict. It has passed legislation that would provide for so-called “special status.” In December 2014, Ukraine

attempted to hold local elections in the Donbas consistent with Ukrainian election laws, as called for by the Minsk agreements, only to be blocked by Russia. It has held elections throughout the rest of Ukraine and would do so in the Donbas as well if the Government of Ukraine were able to access these Russia-controlled areas.

Unfortunately, Russia appears to have made a deliberate choice to maintain the status quo. Russia continues to prop up its puppet regimes, the so-called “People’s Republics” of Donetsk and Luhansk that have no place under the Minsk agreements or Ukraine’s constitutional order. Russia continues to lead and support the fighting, and has yet to implement a ceasefire or withdraw its forces from eastern Ukraine. Russia’s highly provocative recent decision to provide expedited Russian citizenship to Ukrainians in the Donbas created another serious obstacle to the implementation of the Minsk agreements and the reintegration of the Russia-controlled territories in the east. There is a lot that Russia has to do to stop its ongoing aggression against Ukraine so that we can get on with the other aspects of full implementation of Minsk. It’s very much what we want to do, but Russia remains intransigent.

In the meantime, the people living on both sides of the frontlines but especially in the Russia-controlled areas of the Donbas need as much support and assistance as can be delivered by the Ukrainian government and by the international community. Many things need to be done – including assisting with mine clearance in areas where the Ukrainian government actually has control, improving the safety of boundary crossings between the Russia-controlled areas and the rest of Ukraine, facilitating the delivery of pensions to those needing assistance, making sure that vital services such as gas, water, and electricity are connected and continuing. These are all areas where, with the support of international humanitarian organizations, I believe more can be done. We continue our close cooperation with the Ukrainian government, our European Allies, and international organizations to address the humanitarian suffering.

The United States has provided and will continue to provide support to protect and assist conflict-affected Ukrainians in the Donbas. This includes mental health and psychosocial support, legal aid, and critical infrastructure repair. These activities have also demonstrated the tangible reform progress that Ukraine has made since the Revolution of Dignity and helped build relationships between citizens and the state impacted by the on-going conflict. In providing communities of the Donbas with modern administrative services and opportunities to young entrepreneurs, Ukraine is supporting economic revitalization and good governance in the region and illustrating the way a united Ukraine can provide a better life for its citizens.

Of course, the best step that could be taken to end this artificial conflict would be for Russia to get out of eastern Ukraine. In addition to our own bilateral efforts, we support the French and German efforts in the Normandy Quartet and the work of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in the Trilateral Contact Group, and we coordinate closely to ensure our bilateral efforts and negotiations complement these efforts. Unfortunately, Russia has been stalling and uninterested in progress for the past 18 months.

The election of President Zelenskyy creates a good opportunity to re-energize efforts to end the five-year old conflict in the Donbas. President Zelenskyy has repeatedly reiterated his commitment to peace and to the Minsk agreements, to seek to ease the suffering of the people in the Donbas, and has expressed an openness to creative approaches to break the deadlock. During

this critical period, it is vital that the United States continue to support Ukraine and work closely with the new president on his diplomatic initiatives.

We have encouraged the Russians through a variety of channels to take advantage of this opportunity. I would like to meet with my Russian counterparts in the near future, but I do not know what form that will take at the moment. I am willing to meet with them to discuss a way forward, if Russia is serious about making progress. I told the Russians that a good first step would be for Russia to release the Ukrainian sailors and vessels it seized during its unjustified attack near the Kerch Strait, which would be in keeping with the recent provisional order of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea.

While we are open to supporting initial confidence-building steps, we are also focused on the central elements of Minsk implementation, starting with the ceasefire, withdrawal of foreign forces, the disarming of the illegal armed groups, and creating a situation of security in the Donbas so that additional political steps that are also part of Minsk can be taken. These include amnesty for people who've committed crimes as part of the conflict, implementing a so-called special status for the region under Ukraine's constitution, and holding local elections, resulting in the peaceful reintegration of this territory with the rest of Ukraine.

We hope that Russia will finally choose peace and work with us to end the fighting. In the meantime, it is important to continue to strengthen Ukraine and increase its resilience to better withstand Russian aggression and to support ongoing reforms to integrate Ukraine more closely with the West. We will continue to support the work of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission, which serves as the world's "eyes and ears" for the conflict in eastern Ukraine and now includes approximately 800 monitors and 420 local staff operating under extremely challenging political and security conditions. We are working with Ukraine on its reform agenda and creating an open, competitive economy that creates opportunity for its people. A democratic, free, and prosperous Ukraine creates a stark contrast with those living in a second-rate police state in the Russia-controlled Donbas.