

June 20, 2016

The Honorable Donald Tusk President The European Council Rue de la Loi 175 B-1048 Brussels Belgium

Dear President Tusk:

We write to urge the European Council to roll over EU sanctions on Russia this month. According to the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE) Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) weekly reports, at least 122 Ukrainian military personnel have been killed and more than 700 have been injured since the announcement of a September 1, 2015, ceasefire. Russia has not implemented other aspects of the Minsk agreements, including – but not limited to – the withdrawal of all heavy weapons and allowing unfettered, safe access to the OSCE SMM. It is essential that the U.S. and the EU maintain transatlantic solidarity in the face of Russia's blatant disregard for its Minsk commitments and continued illegal occupation of Crimea.

There has been a surge in cease-fire violations in recent weeks. Combined Russian-separatist forces have increased their attacks and have resumed firing destructive 152mm artillery that is prohibited under the Minsk agreements. Under the Minsk II agreement of February 15, 2015, all heavy weapons were to be withdrawn within 15 days. In contravention of the agreement, on June 4 and 5, the SMM reported 15 multiple launch rocket systems and multiple surface-to-air missile systems in separatist-controlled territory. This follows a June 2 report of an unusual build-up of heavy weapons and personnel carriers in Donetsk and Luhansk cities, including 24 tanks in Donetsk city alone.

Further, combined Russian-separatist forces continue to deny access to OSCE monitors who are tasked with monitoring the ceasefire, and they have engaged in violence against the SMM and the downing of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). OSCE Chairperson-in-Office and German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Serbian Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić, Austrian Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz, and OSCE Secretary General Lamberto Zannier issued a joint statement on April 12 in which they concluded "incidents against SMM monitors, as reported by the Mission in recent days, are unacceptable and that those responsible for threatening and using force against civilian monitors must be held accountable." Mr. Zannier condemned the June 2 downing of the SMM's last remaining long-range UAV, saying that the SMM was subject to a "deliberate effort to blind it."

Constant attacks by combined Russian-separatist forces have forced Ukraine to close crossing points at the line of contact in order to protect civilians from shelling. Restrictions on international aid organizations by combined Russian-separatist forces prevent food, medicine, and other humanitarian goods from reaching people in need. In addition, Russia must release those it is holding in violation of Minsk, including Stanislav Klikh, Mykola Karpyuk, Akhtem Ciygoz, Oleg Sentsov, Aleksander Kolchenko, Yuriy Soloshenko, Olexandr Kostenko and all other Ukrainian citizens it has wrongfully imprisoned.

Sanctions relief is tied to Russia's progress implementing the Minsk ceasefire agreements. Given the severity of Russia's ongoing violations and continuing aggression against Ukraine, including its occupation of Crimea in complete contravention of international law and norms, we urge the European Council to extend sanctions against Russia until it fully complies with its international commitments.

Sincerely,

Benjamin L. Cardin

United States Senator

Richard J. Durbin

United States Senator

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United States Senator

John McCain

United States Senator

Rob Portman

United States Senator

Ron Johnson

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