

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 9, 2017

The Honorable Rex Tillerson
Secretary of State
United States Department of State
2201 C Street Northwest
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Tillerson:

We are concerned by the recent escalation of violence by Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine and the lack of a clear and consistent policy by the new Administration to deter Russian aggression. We urge you to end any ambiguity and affirm that you oppose Russia's unacceptable actions through vigorous enforcement of sanctions for its military aggression in eastern Ukraine, as imposed by Executive Orders 13660, 13661, 13662, and 13685. This surge in violence takes place during our nation's political transition and indicates that Russia is testing this Administration's resolve in supporting the Ukrainian government and people. Now that you have assumed your responsibilities as Secretary of State, we encourage you to send a strong signal to Russia that the United States remains resolute in its desire to hold Russia accountable for its illegal annexation and continued military aggression in eastern Ukraine.

The United States must prioritize Russian compliance with the Minsk Agreement, as it is clear that Russia does not deserve sanctions relief for the conflict it created and continues to fuel. Since Russia's invasion and illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, there have been at least 10,000 deaths, 20,000 wounded, and two million internally displaced people, according to conservative estimates by the United Nations. The situation in eastern Ukraine remains incredibly unstable, with nearly 300,000 ceasefire violations in 2016, according to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

New outbursts of shelling by Russian-backed militants in Avdiivka – a government-held town located north of Donetsk in eastern Ukraine – reaffirms the need for further sanctions pressure to be applied to Russia. This recent escalation raises significant humanitarian concerns, as attacks by Russian-backed militants have caused at least 34 deaths and dozens of injuries. It has also caused significant damage to Avdiivka's electricity and water supply, leaving the community without heat in below freezing temperatures. The intensifying of shelling in Avdiivka indicates that Russia intends to carry out its atrocious agenda under the watch of the Trump Administration.

As Secretary of State, we urge you to reassure the American public, as well as our European allies, that this Administration will not stand for Russia's blatant violations of international laws and borders. Over the last three years, the United States has worked with the European Union to implement sanctions against Russia, as well as increased cooperation with NATO allies to defend freedom and democracy in the region. Strengthened and enhanced enforcement of sanctions, as well as the imposition of additional sanctions on Russia, will prove

that the Department of State remains ready to hold Russia accountable. Further, it sends a signal of strong support to Ukraine and the active Ukrainian-American community.

Despite President Trump's reported promise to maintain sanctions and his call with President Poroshenko, as well as U.S. UN Ambassador Nikki Haley's condemnation of Russia's aggression in eastern Ukraine and dedication to sanctions, the Administration needs to reaffirm clearly its commitment to support Ukraine's sovereignty and integrity. We remain troubled by President Trump's comments drawing an erroneous moral equivalence between the United States and Russia, and believe you should ensure – both through rhetoric and action – that our country does not condone Russian behavior that violates international laws and standards. We offer our assistance as you work to strengthen the U.S.-Ukraine relationship and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate



RICHARD J. DURBIN
United States Senate



ELIZABETH WARREN
United States Senate



AMY KLOBUCHAR
United States Senate



SHERROD BROWN
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