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**STATEMENT BY MR. VLADIMIR ZHEGLOV,
DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1337th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

30 September 2021

On the deteriorating situation in Ukraine and the continued non-implementation by the Ukrainian authorities of the Minsk agreements

Madam Chairperson,

The stalemate in the settlement of the crisis in Ukraine persists.

There has been no progress so far in implementing the urgent instructions of the “Normandy format” summit of 9 December 2019 regarding the agreement of all the legal aspects of a special status for Donbas. These include not only the special status as such, but also resolving the issues of an amnesty, guarantees of linguistic and cultural rights, and opportunities to maintain the region’s natural socio-economic links.

Instead of working together to determine the future of Donbas as part of Ukraine in accordance with the Minsk agreements, the Ukrainian Government prefers to continue to strangle the region with a socio-economic, transport and food blockade. Such measures are in no way conducive to the reintegration of certain areas of Donbas and lead only to them being pushed further out of the common space shared with the rest of Ukraine.

The Ukrainian authorities are unwilling to listen to the opinion of the residents of Donbas themselves or their plenipotentiary representatives in the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG). The cultivation of a false paradigm about the alleged need for dialogue with Russia, rather than with the people of Donbas themselves, only wastes time in the settlement process. The Ukrainian Government’s obstructionism at the TCG has led to serious setbacks in the TCG’s work. This was confirmed by the latest futile videoconferences of the TCG and its working groups on 28 and 29 September.

In the current circumstances, a resumption of face-to-face meetings of the TCG would help to intensify discussions. As you know, the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk have repeatedly expressed their willingness to resume travelling to Minsk. At the same time, the authorities in Kyiv categorically refuse to return to the usual forms of work. In that connection, it should be recognized that no organizational modalities for TCG meetings will make any difference as long as the Ukrainian authorities lack the political will to stop the shooting, hear what is being said and reach agreements.

Against this backdrop, the situation in the east of the country shows no sign of improving. Observations by the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) have revealed fresh military preparations by the Ukrainian armed forces. In addition to transporting weapons near the line of contact by rail, the Ukrainian armed forces carried out engineering works in the summer months, which are classed as offensive operations under the ceasefire-strengthening measures of 22 July 2020.

For example, between 26 July and 26 August, the Ukrainian military dug new trenches in the Donetsk region close to Mykolaivka (540 metres in length), near Slavne (60 metres in length) and near Bohdanivka (80 metres in length in total). They equipped each of the last two sites with a mortar pit. The SMM assessed the Ukrainian armed forces' actions as forward moves in areas where the distance between the sides' forward positions is between 1.1 and 2.1 km. Over the same period, only minor extensions by the Donbas militia, 20 metres in length in total, were detected.

The Ukrainian military command is demonstratively disregarding its obligations under the aforementioned measures. It is stating for all to hear that it has no intention of fulfilling these obligations and that the army has different orders. The Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Valerii Zaluzhnyi, admitted this in an interview with Radio Svoboda on 25 September. In particular, he said that Ukrainian soldiers were not prohibited from opening fire, and that commanders at the line of contact take decisions in this regard independently, without any green light being given by their superiors. In the same interview, he confirmed that Ukrainian sniper teams had arrived at the line of contact. He also added that the Ukrainian armed forces made full use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to carry out combat tasks, because "there is no shortage of drones".

It would not be amiss to recall here the content of the ceasefire-strengthening measures of 22 July 2020 agreed upon and signed by the representative of Ukraine. For example, for the whole period until full comprehensive settlement of the conflict, corresponding ceasefire orders must be issued containing the following measures: a ban on firing, including sniper fire; a ban on the operation of UAVs; a ban on offensive, reconnaissance and sabotage operations; the use of disciplinary actions for violations of these measures. At the same time, retaliatory fire is only permissible if it occurs by order of the leadership of the Ukrainian armed forces and the leadership of the armed formations of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, respectively, after an unsuccessful attempt to make use the co-ordination mechanism for responding to ceasefire violations through the facilitation of the Joint Centre for Control and Co-ordination (JCCC) in its current setting.

Ukraine's position on the co-ordination mechanism is known: the Ukrainian Government refuses to launch it properly, not wanting to communicate with the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk within the framework of the JCCC in its current setting. While the Ukrainian armed forces command is effectively disavowing its commitment to the ceasefire-strengthening measures, Ukrainian soldiers are provoking tension at the line of contact and carrying out offensive operations.

Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the instances of shelling are increasing, and the SMM is recording new casualties. For the second consecutive month, the number of civilian casualties broke sorry records. Since the beginning of September alone, the Mission has confirmed the reports of one Donbas resident being killed and eleven injured, all of them in certain areas of the Donetsk region. In just one day, on 17 September, four residents of Donetsk were injured as a result of shelling on the outskirts of the city (SMM reports dated 25, 27 and 28 September).

The situation in the rest of Ukraine remains no less worrying and requires the OSCE's attention just as much. A meeting of representatives of the diocesan legal departments of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) was held in Kyiv on 20 September. The participants noted that discrimination on the grounds of

religious affiliation continues in Ukraine. For example, Law No. 2662-VIII on the renaming of religious organizations is in force in the country, which has effectively blocked the activities of UOC religious organizations, depriving them of the opportunity to update their data in the Ukrainian State registers. Law No. 2673 VIII regulating the change of affiliation, which provides for the possibility of interference in the activities of parishes, is also in force. These discriminatory acts have led to the legally questionable re-registration of religious communities (about 500 cases), seizures of parishes (144 cases), instances of UOC clergy and adherents being beaten up, arson attacks on churches (26 cases), acts of vandalism (22 cases), robberies (42 cases), and intimidation and blackmail that has become part and parcel of the life of UOC adherents. All this is the result of the brutal interference in the UOC by Ukraine's political leadership that began in 2018. We urge the SMM and all the relevant OSCE institutions not to reduce their focus on manifestations of discrimination, which frequently involve violence.

In conclusion, we reiterate our appeal to Ukraine's external "handlers" to ensure, not in words but in deeds, that their charges in Kyiv respect their commitments in the field of human rights and fundamental freedoms. We emphasize that resolving the crisis in Ukraine, including the armed confrontation in the east of the country, requires meaningful nationwide dialogue and a responsible approach to implementation of the agreements reached. Lasting peace in Donbas can and should be ensured on the basis of the Minsk Package of Measures endorsed by United Nations Security Council resolution 2202.

I should like to make one further remark about the Minsk agreements, which the distinguished participants in the discussions recalled today. No one disputes that the Minsk agreements – in the form in which they were enumerated in the "Normandy communiqué" – just like it says there continue to be the basis of the work of the Normandy format. At the same time, we are surprised at how a number of speakers prefer to overlook the special legal validity of the Minsk Package of Measures of 12 February 2015. And yet it not only reflected the changed military situation "on the ground" by February 2015 and not only incorporated the provisions of the previous Minsk agreements, but it is also the sole document regulating the political, peaceful settlement of the conflict in eastern Ukraine. Last but not least, that document, which has been endorsed by the United Nations Security Council and attached as an annex to resolution 2202, has become part of international law and is binding. We would advise you not forget this.

Thank you for your attention.