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**STATEMENT BY MR. DMITRY BALAKIN,
DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN
FEDERATION, AT THE 1218th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

28 February 2019

**On the situation in Ukraine and the need to implement the
Minsk agreements**

Mr. Chairperson,

Five years ago, in these February days, tragic events took place in Ukraine that led to the unconstitutional overthrow of the authorities in Kyiv. The coup d'état, in the wake of the blatant interference by a number of Western States in the internal affairs of Ukraine, became the “trigger” for the uncontrolled spread of the internal conflict.

The leaders of the protest movements, who had gained a “pyrrhic victory” over the legitimate authorities, cancelled in an instant the compromise agreement of 21 February 2014 between the then President, Viktor Yanukovich, and the opposition on the settlement of the political crisis. They were immediately supported in this by the United States of America and several European countries, including those that had publicly assumed the responsibility of acting as guarantors for the settlement. As a result, their pseudo-mediation was reduced merely to calls to “recognize the new realities”, but in fact this led to the new authorities feeling complete impunity. With the support of the driving forces of the “Maidan”, recruited from among radical nationalists and neo-Nazis, they embarked on the forcible Ukrainization of all aspects of life and the violent suppression of dissent. Regular troops and punitive battalions were sent in against the peaceable citizens who disagreed with this. This led to the spread of the crisis and – ultimately – to the armed civil confrontation in south-eastern Ukraine, whose inhabitants did not accept the results of the coup.

Today, after five years, the Ukrainian public and the international community have still not been presented with the final results of the investigation into the shooting of protesters and law enforcement officers on the “Maidan”. No answers have been given as to how combat weapons, including sniper rifles, came to be there at the height of the confrontation. Both the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine and various international human rights organizations, including Amnesty International, have recently drawn attention to the fact that the current authorities are dragging out the investigation.

After having “tried out” various templates for building “ethnocratic regimes”, the new Ukrainian leadership gave the green light for the total rampage of radical nationalism and neo-Nazism. The glorification, at the State level, of Nazi collaborators and torchlit processions in their honour under slogans inciting hatred, enmity and intolerance have in the meantime become commonplace in Ukraine. We note in that connection the principled stance taken by the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Miroslav Lajčák, who recently voiced his concern over the rise of nationalism in Ukraine, linked in particular to the glorification of the Nazi accomplice Stepan Bandera.

Against this background, the punitive operation unleashed by the Ukrainian Government in Donbas continues. In 2014, Petro Poroshenko already promised to “win the war”, saying that while children in government-controlled territory “would go to kindergarten and school, the children of Donbas would sit in cellars”. Speaking a week and a half ago at the Munich Security Conference, he unhesitatingly assumed the role of the main mouthpiece of the “war party”, declaring that in order to ensure its continued existence Ukraine must “not stop shooting”. On the margins of the same conference, this self-styled “president of peace” called on his Western partners to start supplying “all types of weapons” to Ukraine. It is quite obvious that Ukraine intends not only to arm itself, but also to use the weapons supplied to continue talking to the population of Donbas in the language of military force. It is no coincidence that Ukrainian military strategists are deliberately exacerbating the situation at the line of contact. In early February, nationalist battalions, such as Azov and Right Sector, whose leaders have repeatedly advocated conducting ruthless mopping-up operations in Donbas, returned there.

The leadership of Ukraine demonstrates blatant disregard for the Minsk agreements. The Ukrainian Government is sabotaging the fulfilment of almost all its obligations under the Minsk Package of Measures of 12 February 2015, beginning with the first point on a ceasefire (we will distribute the relevant information today). Owing to the position adopted by Ukraine in the Trilateral Contact Group, it has proved impossible to agree on a spring truce along the lines of last year’s (6 or 7 March). This indicates that the Ukrainian Government does not renounce the option of armed provocations. According to the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), over the past two weeks, the ceasefire regime in Donbas has been violated more than 10,000 times. The amount of Ukrainian armed forces’ military equipment missing from storage and withdrawal sites is almost ten times higher than the figures for the militia. Heavy weapons belonging to the Ukrainian armed forces continue to be transported by rail. Damage to residential buildings as a result of shelling has again been reported in Donetsk, Oleksandrivka, Holmivskiyi, Dokuchaievsk, Kominternove and Kruta Hora. A kindergarten in Zolote-5/Mykhailivka came under fire once again on 15 February, and a local woman was injured in Kominternove.

The continued shelling is largely a result of the lack of progress in the disengagement of forces and hardware. The Ukrainian armed forces are deliberately frustrating this process and strengthening their positions inside the Zolote disengagement area. The SMM spotted no less than three Ukrainian armoured infantry fighting vehicles there, and also new minefields. It is not surprising that recently the intensity of the shooting precisely there has increased. There is also trouble in Petrivske. In Stanytsia Luhanska, where a calm situation can once again be observed, the Ukrainian armed forces are simply taking no notice of the disengagement.

Ukrainian security forces are violating the Minsk agreements, deploying unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) near the line of contact and flying combat aircraft over Donbas. On 20 February, the SMM recorded three low-flying UAVs near government-controlled Lebedynske in the Donetsk region, and on 24 February the launch by Ukrainian military personnel of two UAVs near Popasna in the Luhansk region. On 21 February, the Mission spotted four jet aircraft flying from north to south over Lastochkyne in the Donetsk region. This is a direct violation of Point 7 of the Memorandum of 19 September 2014.

We roundly condemn any threats to the SMM or attempts to intimidate the monitors, no matter from whom they come. We note the overtly provocative nature of the explosions in Donetsk on 18 February. They occurred near the Park Inn Hotel, where SMM monitors – citizens of various countries, including Russia – are housed. Under these conditions it is extremely important to come to agreement on additional measures for de-escalation, including a ban on sabotage activities. We urge Ukraine to stop blocking the relevant discussion in the Minsk Trilateral Contact Group at once.

Mr. Chairperson,

The deteriorating humanitarian situation in Donbas is a direct consequence of the actions of the Ukrainian leadership to strangle the region. The Ukrainian Government imposed and enshrined in law a transport and socio-economic blockade of Donbas, refusing to pay the pensions and benefits due to the inhabitants of the region. They are forced to make regular trips through the danger zone and across the line of contact to obtain these payments. Since the end of December, the SMM has recorded more than a dozen deaths of elderly people who were forced to queue for hours. Last week, on 23 February, a car carrying three civilians returning home to Donetsk hit a mine in the “grey zone” while travelling between checkpoints of the Ukrainian armed forces and the militia near Olenivka. Two people were killed and one injured.

We hear ideas about the need to increase the number of checkpoints and improve their throughput capacity as a means of easing the situation at the line of contact. The parties should reach an agreement in the Trilateral Contact Group on this and on demining. They should also discuss the various incidents in which UAVs have been obstructed. We consider the appeals to Russia to be inappropriate. At the same time, given the current situation, all these measures cannot be considered a panacea. Only the unconditional and complete lifting of the blockade of everyday life in Donbas by the Ukrainian Government would bring about a real improvement in the situation. Instead of creating new dividing lines and strangling Donbas, the focus should be on restoring ties and trying to “stick the country back together” before it is too late, by such means as the good-faith implementation of the commitments under the Minsk Package of Measures.

In practice, however, the Ukrainian leadership is stubbornly trying to fudge the facts and shift on to our country the blame for the “stalling” of the Minsk agreements, which amounts simply to a deliberate attempt on its part to derail the prospect of a settlement. There is no mention in the Minsk agreements about any obligations on the part of Russia. It provides for obligations by the parties (the Ukrainian Government and the authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk) to make reciprocal efforts in the fields of politics and security and in the humanitarian and socio-economic spheres.

However, yesterday's meeting of the Trilateral Contact Group in Minsk once again demonstrated the Ukrainian Government's unwillingness to engage in productive dialogue with Donbas. The Ukrainian negotiators are trying to force the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk out of the negotiations in the Trilateral Contact Group under the pretext of their alleged illegitimacy. In the Working Group on Political Issues, representatives of the Ukrainian Government refuse to provide documentary confirmation of the procedure for the enactment of the law on special status under the Steinmeier formula. They walked out of the meeting of the Working Group on Humanitarian Issues altogether under a flimsy pretext. The price of such stubbornness by the authorities of Ukraine is new victims, suffering and destruction.

We see blame-shifting and references to imagined "Russian aggression", which was invented by the Ukrainian Government's strategists as a lurid pretext for justifying the punitive operations against the people of Donbas. All domestic policy failures are also blamed on this false construction. The authorities cultivate primitive nationalism and Russophobia, which permeate almost all aspects of public life, including the selection of participants for the Eurovision Song Contest. The level of corruption in the country is skyrocketing, and the efforts to combat it are having tangible results for almost nobody, including the main international creditors. It is telling that, against this background, in 2018 Ukraine dropped to 88th place in the UN Human Development Index. According to Ukrainian Government agencies, over half a million of the country's inhabitants left Ukraine last year in search of a better life.

Mr. Chairperson,

Resolution of the crisis and implementation of the Minsk Package of Measures should not become the subject of political speculation as a complicated election campaign gathers momentum in Ukraine. There is already talk that hardly any progress can be expected in the Ukrainian Government's position on Donbas until after the presidential or even the parliamentary elections in Ukraine. In the current conditions, given the bellicose attitude of the Ukrainian leadership, this would be extremely dangerous. The region is not immune to fresh attempts by scheming Ukrainian politicians to increase their ratings by means of armed provocations or even a "little victorious war".

Every new day should bring Donbas closer to peace and the entire country closer to achieving national harmony. We need to ensure that Ukraine stops sabotaging its commitments and strictly implements all the provisions of the Minsk Package of Measures of 12 February 2015 in a full and co-ordinated manner.

Thank you for your attention.