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PC.DEL/1895/21
16 December 2021

ENGLISH
Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY
MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1349th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

16 December 2021

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

Madam Chairperson,

Now drawing to its close, the year 2021 has proved to be yet another year of missed opportunities for Ukraine in terms of securing peace in Donbas and achieving sustainable socio-economic development for the country as a whole.

The work aimed at moving forward on practical issues related to the settlement process has come to a dangerous standstill. The reason for this is the unwillingness of the Ukrainian authorities to implement the arrangements agreed on with the authorities in Donbas as regards de-escalation, a ceasefire and the provision of appropriate security guarantees so that humanitarian challenges and socio-economic issues can be resolved. There has been no progress whatsoever on the political aspects of the settlement process in line with the stipulations of the Minsk Package of Measures of 12 February 2015, which was endorsed by United Nations Security Council resolution 2202.

Against this backdrop, the Ukrainian Government is issuing countless appeals to new international contacts for the sake simply of holding a meeting – in circumstances where it cannot be said that the previous agreements have been implemented – for example, a meeting in the same Normandy format. Indeed, the Ukrainian authorities are generally not hiding the fact that they are exploiting the discussions on Ukraine in multilateral formats as a substitute for the required internal Ukrainian dialogue and also to rewrite the Minsk agreements.

This year, a whole series of attempts have been undertaken in Ukraine to make implementation of the Package of Measures legally impossible. A glaring example is the draft law on the so-called transition period. It directly prohibits Ukrainian officials from implementing the provisions of the Minsk Package. Thus, it provides for the political settlement process to be replaced by the deployment of armed forces and the establishment of civil-military administrations. Instead of an amnesty as stipulated, it provides for the removal of undesirable individuals by such means as “lustration” [i.e., a purge of civil servants]. All this, of course, without any political guarantees being given to the population of Donbas with regard to the region’s special status.

Evading the question of such a status, the authorities in Kyiv continue to come up with ever new tricks. For example, on 10 December, President Zelenskyy announced plans to hold some sort of “referendum on Donbas” with the aim of “ending the war”. It would therefore seem that over in Kyiv they are no longer even considering implementation of the Minsk agreements as such to achieve that aim. The President emphasized that this referendum was not concerned with the region’s status. Moreover, the Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian Parliament), Ruslan Stefanchuk, specified that only residents of areas controlled by the Ukrainian armed forces would be able to take part in such a referendum. As we can see, the Ukrainian authorities persist in refusing to hear the voice of the residents of certain areas of Donbas or that of their plenipotentiary representatives in the Trilateral Contact Group. It is not surprising that on that same day, 10 December, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Dmytro Kuleba, stressed in his article for the magazine *Foreign Affairs* that “Ukraine’s goal is simple: peace through strength.”

It is astonishing that, in these circumstances, some Western countries are increasing their military and technical support to the Ukrainian Government and continuing to supply it with lethal weapons. As part of alleged “training co-operation” with the Ukrainian armed forces, hundreds of foreign military personnel from several NATO countries continue to operate in Ukraine.

On 14 December, at the President’s behest, the Verkhovna Rada permitted foreign military to enter Ukrainian territory in 2022 to take part in international exercises. The exercises scheduled for next year are expected to be on a much larger scale than those that took place this year. Even more military personnel from NATO countries will be involved in these activities, while the budget for them has been increased two-and-a-half-fold. These are all signs of a determination to tackle the existing problems in the east of the country by military means. Not to mention the fact that, by taking part in such exercises, the Alliance’s countries are encouraging the Ukrainian authorities not to implement the Minsk Package of Measures, in particular paragraph 10, which stipulates the withdrawal of foreign armed formations, equipment and mercenaries from the territory of Ukraine. I would emphasize that it is a question of ensuring the withdrawal of troops, not their entry into the country!

Over this past year, we have drawn attention to instances of military goods being supplied to the Ukrainian Government, which have ultimately led to an escalation of tensions at the line of contact. This refers, among other items, to Turkish Bayraktar unmanned combat aerial vehicles and US Javelin missile systems: the Ukrainian military leadership recently announced publicly that these were being put to combat use. They have been used in violation of the existing ceasefire arrangements and, in the case of the Bayraktar devices, explicitly as part of offensive operations in the area of the settlements of Hranitne and Staromarivka in the south of the Donetsk region. I would remind you that the Ukrainian military’s forward move there was subsequently confirmed by the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. Significantly, after journalists asked about the justification for the use of such weapons, the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine issued an official explanation to the effect that such information would henceforth be classified as secret.

As for the position of those who are in no hurry to dispatch lethal weapons to Ukraine, representatives of the Ukrainian authorities choose to refer to it as “warped pacifism”, as the country’s Ambassador to Germany, Andrii Melnyk, for example, put it a few days ago.

With the Ukrainian Government’s support, illegal paramilitary formations of Ukrainian nationalists (such as Right Sector) continue to be present in Donbas – again, in contravention of paragraph 10 of the Package of Measures.

In this context we are hearing absurd accusations from a number of NATO capitals alleging that Russia is milking the Ukraine issue for the purposes of “aggressive rhetoric”. We must stress that during all these past years it is not Russia that has moved closer to the line of contact with NATO; rather, it is the Alliance that has used the territory of our neighbouring countries to increase its military capabilities near Russia’s borders. We may see how Ukraine has been assigned a very specific role in this strategy. Geopolitical considerations are evidently more important for its foreign handlers than the fate of the residents of Donbas. There is no other way of accounting for the continued military “beefing up” of Ukraine or for the connivance with the Ukrainian Government’s evasion of direct dialogue with the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk and with its sabotaging of a political settlement under the Minsk agreements.

Certain States have no qualms about flaunting their external steering of Ukraine and publicly interfere in its domestic affairs. Last week, for example, the United States of America announced the imposition of sanctions against the “former” – as it is claimed – head of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine, Oleksandr Tupytskyi. For several months, the President of Ukraine has been trying to remove him from office – what is more, in spite of judicial decisions indicating that the Head of State does not have the power to do so. And also in spite of the fact that the Supreme Court of Ukraine is still hearing the case. This message to the effect that the aforementioned representative of Ukraine’s highest judicial office allegedly has no power was personally echoed by the US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken. I would point out that all this is being done to a chorus of statements about the need to respect the sovereignty of Ukraine and to strengthen the rule of law there and independence of the judiciary. We are seeing the opposite in practice.

It is impossible to ignore the Ukrainian Government’s assault on fundamental human rights and freedoms, the muzzling of dissent and the encouragement of extremist and neo-Nazi sentiments. The Ukrainian leadership actively resorted to the expedient of extrajudicial reprisals this year. The National Security and Defence Council decided that major nationwide television channels, journalists and public figures should be subject to so-called sanctions. They were all deprived of the right to defend themselves in court.

This year, new provisions of discriminatory Ukrainian legislative acts in the area of language and education came into force which are having a direct impact on the lives of millions of Russian-speaking inhabitants of the country. The authorities have maintained the discriminatory legal framework for the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church, continuing *de facto* to facilitate the appropriation of churches and other church property from its parishes.

No headway has been made in ascertaining the truth about the Maidan shootings in February 2014, the massacre of civilians in the Trade Union House in Odessa and many other crimes perpetrated by radicals. The efforts to clarify all the circumstances of the high-profile murders of the journalists Oles Buzina, Pavel Sheremet and Vadim Komarov are being dragged out. As a rule, manifestations of aggressive nationalism do not receive any legal evaluation at all. There is no investigation into the circumstances of the massive loss of civilian life during the punitive operation in Donbas or into the part played in this slaughter by nationalist battalions and the Ukrainian military. According to the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk, some 150 makeshift mass graves have been discovered in certain areas of Donbas to date; hundreds of people are still reported missing.

All this is creating a climate of impunity in the country and is in fact giving free rein to neo-Nazis and other extremists. Incidentally, this tendency was again flagged by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in its recent thematic report. We note with regret the slow response – or, in some cases, the lack of any response whatsoever – of the relevant OSCE structures to manifestations of discrimination in Ukraine and to the rampant legal nihilism in general.

We once again call upon the external handlers of Ukraine and also upon all OSCE institutions to bring their existing influence to bear so as to induce the Ukrainian authorities to fulfil their commitments. It is important to send a clear signal to the Ukrainian Government as regards the inadmissibility of military adventures and the perniciousness of its policy of stoking armed violence in Donbas and exacerbating social conflicts. The Package of Measures is the sole internationally recognized framework for a political settlement of the internal conflict in Ukraine. The sooner this is grasped in Kyiv, the sooner the country will be able to return to a life in peace.

Thank you for your attention.