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**STATEMENT BY MR. DMITRY BALAKIN,
DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1098th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

28 April 2016

**In response to the statements by the
Chief Monitor of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine,
Ambassador Ertuğrul Apakan, and the Special Representative of
the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine and in the
Trilateral Contact Group, Ambassador Martin Sajdik**

Mr. Chairperson,
Ambassadors Apakan and Sajdik,

We are pleased to welcome you once again to the OSCE Permanent Council. We appreciate your efforts to help resolve the Ukrainian crisis within the framework of the Trilateral Contact Group and as the Chief Monitor of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM).

We believe that implementing the Minsk Package of Measures is the only way of achieving a peaceful and sustainable settlement of the situation. Progress depends entirely on the development of direct dialogue between the Ukrainian Government, Donetsk and Luhansk in the Trilateral Contact Group. The assistance of the Normandy format remains crucial. We are particularly grateful to Belarus for providing a platform for negotiations and ensuring favourable conditions for the work of the Trilateral Contact Group and its specialist subgroups.

We note the personal contribution by Ambassador Martin Sajdik and the efforts of the subgroup co-ordinators, in particular Ambassador Ertuğrul Apakan of the subgroup on security issues in helping the parties to find mutually acceptable solutions. It has been possible to achieve a number of constructive agreements – on demining and on ending live-fire exercises in the security zone.

We firmly believe that the work in all of the subgroups should be focused on making progress in their specific areas without any linkage to the progress made in the other subgroups. We see that unfortunately the Ukrainian Government continues to use the tension which it is itself provoking on the line of contact as a pretext for avoiding dialogue on the key problems. Now that friction between the President and Government of Ukraine has been

eliminated and a new Cabinet of Ministers established, we trust that the process will proceed more quickly.

We welcome the visit to Vienna by the co-ordinator of the group on humanitarian issues, Toni Frisch. We are impressed by his impartial work with the representatives of the Ukrainian Government, Donetsk and Luhansk and his understanding that only an equal approach to the parties can yield practical results.

Mr. Chairperson,

We are seriously concerned at the sharp increase in tension in Donbas. We have repeatedly pointed to the danger of provocation by the Ukrainian security forces, which are seizing additional territory.

Already in December 2015, eight sites had been seized in the previously neutral zone, including Pavlopil and Pyshchevyk. Then the Ukrainian army massed forces on the outskirts of Zaitseve. In January 2016, large-calibre artillery systems appeared in Toshkivka and Popasana. In late February, Ukrainian soldiers appeared in the demilitarized village of Shyrokyne, where the militias had withdrawn their forces as a goodwill gesture.

On 20 April, the SMM reported that the Ukrainian checkpoint near Berezove had been moved three kilometres towards Olenivka, where a militia checkpoint is located. A Ukrainian soldier confirmed that the Ukrainian armed forces intended to seize new territory. The Mission warned that this kind of violation of the Minsk Memorandum “can be perceived as provocation” and “poses a considerable risk of escalation”.

Unfortunately, the monitors turned out to be right in this case. In the early hours of 27 April, the village of Olenivka was shelled by the Ukrainians. According to the SMM, the shelling came from a west-south-west direction (from Ukrainian armed forces’ positions) using 120 mm artillery guns. Four civilians were killed, including a pregnant woman. The shells struck cars which were parked overnight at a checkpoint queuing to cross the line of contact. Six houses and a hospital were also damaged. An observation post of the Joint Centre for Control and Co-ordination (JCCC) in Shyrokyne had been shelled by tanks and mortars the day before.

Let us return once again to the proposal to ensure that monitors are regularly present at checkpoints on both sides of the line of contact. This is important for the safety of civilians, among other things. There is no need to remind you on whose orders the regime of tough and unjustified restrictions on freedom of movement in Donbas was introduced. This regime poses a threat to the safety of the local inhabitants who are at risk of being shelled, as happened in Olenivka, or being blown up by Ukrainian landmines. We note the horrendous incident in Marinka when a Ukrainian soldier threatened a group of people with a grenade.

We would also remind you of our request that the SMM should prepare a summary report on the consequences of the artillery shelling of towns and villages during the conflict and the targets selected by the parties.

There should be no further escalation and every effort should be made to re-establish the ceasefire regime. We support the proposal to establish an Easter truce.

Distinguished colleagues,

The ceasefire and the withdrawal of heavy weapons as well as all types of tanks, artillery and mortars of less than 100 mm in calibre – these agreements must be implemented. We welcome the SMM's efforts to establish local truces. We believe that the JCCC could be more productive. For this to happen, it is essential to ensure normal co-operation between its Russian and Ukrainian units in their work. Furthermore, the inclusion of representatives of the Donbas militias in the joint patrols organized by the JCCC would help to strengthen trust between the parties. The establishment of direct contacts between subunit commanders on both sides of the line of contact, if only at the level of exchanging telephone contacts, is yet another step that could prevent incidents from occurring. We regret that support for this proposal has not been forthcoming.

We assume that the SMM will increase its patrolling of the security zone considerably, providing genuine mirror monitoring on both sides of the line of contact.

It would be useful to establish a regular SMM presence at the weapons storage sites, in the light of the information from monitors about equipment constantly “going missing” from Ukrainian armed forces’ depots. It is also important to install video cameras at the depots and in the most dangerous parts of the security zone.

We reiterate that it is necessary not only to verify the presence of the equipment at the depots, but also, first and foremost, to make sure that it is not in the security zone, *inter alia* by using technical devices, including fixed cameras. Flights by unmanned aerial vehicles should cover the territory on both sides of the line of contact in equal measure and be carried out under the same conditions with respect to the agreement of flight routes. It is inadmissible for one of the parties to have an advantage.

In the SMM’s reports we regularly encounter information on visits by the monitors to the Russian border. We do not see the same level of interest in the rear units of the Ukrainian army in the Zaporizhia, Dnipropetrovsk and Kharkiv regions, where weapons and equipment are frequently stockpiled.

The SMM mandate is not limited to Donbas. As we remember, it establishes ten deployment locations for monitors across the country. Accurate coverage of events, particularly in connection with the observance of human rights and freedoms, is especially called for now.

We noted the prompt response by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media to the ban on the journalistic activity in Ukraine of the foreign national Savik Shuster, who has once again gone on hunger strike. We expect a similar response to the expulsion of the Russian journalist Daria Grigorova from Ukraine on 24 April.

Generally speaking, we believe that, in keeping with its mandate, the SMM should not ignore the Ukrainian Government’s deliberate violation of OSCE commitments in ensuring the safety of journalists and its introduction of censorship. The Ukrainian Minister of Culture intends to establish an agency to censor concerts and theatrical productions and compile lists of “misguided” cultural figures with a “pro-Russian orientation”. If our colleagues believe that this information is a fabrication or propaganda, let the SMM dispel these doubts and report on what is happening in the Ukrainian media landscape.

A thematic report by the SMM on the activities of extremist and radical organizations in Ukraine is long overdue. If the Mission prepares a report on human rights in Ukraine, this aspect should not be overlooked. The objective work of the SMM is the key to its reputation and that of the OSCE as a whole.

There is ample information in need of verification and an impartial report – clashes in connection with an attempt to pull down a Lenin statue in Limansk (Odessa region), and the torchlit march in Cherkasy in memory of the Nazi group Holodny Yar on 23 April. There are well-known political scientists falling out of windows and public figures suddenly dying in pre-trial detention facilities (for example, Igor Astakhov in Odessa). We urge the SMM to continue to pay the closest attention to the situation in Odessa on the eve of the second anniversary of the tragedy that occurred at Trade Union House. Judging by their announcements, nationalists are preparing to “mark” this anniversary. Heightened vigilance and early warning are extremely important in this case. We cannot allow these tragic events to be repeated.

It is not worth limiting ourselves to the phrase “the SMM continued to monitor the situation in other towns”. The Mission’s budget is large enough for us to be able to receive more information from all the places where it operates.

In conclusion, I should like to mention once more the value of objective reports by the SMM. The information from the Ukrainian Government regarding numerous Russian divisions in Donbas is already annoying because of its ever-changing and unsubstantiated nature. On the other hand, seeing as the Ukrainian Minister of Defence himself has said that 40 per cent of the senior officials of the Ministry of Defence failed a lie-detector test, there is probably no point being surprised at this.

Let us repeat once more: it is of paramount importance to remove the threat of large-scale destabilization on the line of contact and the disruption under that pretext of the fragile political process, primarily of reaching an agreement on the modalities for local elections, resolving vital economic and humanitarian issues and solving the questions of the amnesty, the exchange of prisoners and the entry into force of a law on special status.

We thank Ambassadors Apakan and Sajdik for their efforts to that end and, in wishing them continued success, would like to assure them of our support. This also extends to the SMM and its monitors, whose safety remains a priority for us.

Thank you for your attention.