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PC.DEL/564/21/Corr.1  
22 April 2021

ENGLISH  
Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE  
1310th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL  
VIA VIDEO TELECONFERENCE**

22 April 2021

**In response to the reports by the Special Representative of the  
OSCE Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine and in the Trilateral Contact Group,  
Ambassador Heidi Grau, and the Chief Monitor of the OSCE Special Monitoring  
Mission to Ukraine, Ambassador Yaşar Halit Çevik**

Mr. Chairperson,

We welcome you, Ambassadors Grau and Çevik, to the Permanent Council. We appreciate this opportunity to conduct a frank exchange of opinions.

As far as the settlement of the internal Ukrainian conflict is concerned, the situation has unfortunately not changed for the better since the presentation of your previous reports at the OSCE. The sad statistics capturing new instances of shelling, casualties and destruction in Donbas have merely increased. The 13th of April marked the seventh anniversary of the start of the Ukrainian Government's punitive operation against the residents of Donbas, who did not agree with the outcomes of the February 2014 coup d'état – an operation that has a start date but to which no end is yet in sight.

The current situation as regards the Minsk agreements, the decisions of the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) and the agreed conclusions under the Normandy format can hardly be described as a process for their implementation. Out of all the provisions of the Minsk Package of Measures of 12 February 2015, which was endorsed by United Nations Security Council resolution 2202, not a single paragraph has been fully implemented. This is despite the many years of efforts by the OSCE and, in particular, your own personal endeavours to achieve progress in the implementation of the aforementioned resolution.

The positive effect of the ceasefire-strengthening measures that entered into force on 27 July 2020 is fading away. In the nine months since they were agreed on at the TCG by the representatives of the Ukrainian Government and of the authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk, these measures have ultimately failed to generate the momentum for substantial headway to be made on a long-term settlement of the internal Ukrainian crisis. Ukraine's authorities are deliberately driving the situation into a dead end, continuing to undermine the Minsk agreements and ever more actively trying to discredit the Minsk-based negotiation platform. Thus, on 5 and 6 April, the head of the Ukrainian delegation to the TCG, Leonid Kravchuk, and his first deputy, Oleksii Reznikov, who is also Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Reintegration,

asserted that their delegation categorically refused to participate any more in face-to-face meetings of the TCG in Minsk.

On 13 April, Mr. Reznikov, appearing before the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs, made yet another pronouncement about how the Minsk agreements allegedly "should be modernized because certain points cannot be implemented at the moment". What is more, he made the bold claim that the provisions of the Minsk agreements were "contradicting the standards of the OSCE".<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, there was no public response whatsoever to these destructive arguments of Ukraine's representatives, or any assessments of them, either by the OSCE Chairmanship or by you, Ambassadors Grau and Çevik. No such response is to be heard at present either. Yet, it is precisely under the current conditions that ensuring adherence to the letter of the Minsk agreements and preserving a platform for face-to-face contacts between the parties to the conflict – the Ukrainian Government and the authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk – are of decisive importance for the settlement process.

Ukraine's representatives are the sole participants in the negotiation process who are stubbornly disputing the legal significance and the content of the Minsk agreements – and, thereby, of United Nations Security Council resolution 2202. Supported by external "minders" and its political sponsors, the Ukrainian Government is avoiding direct dialogue with the representatives of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions as provided for by the Package of Measures. It is precisely on the basis of such dialogue that the negotiation process should be structured and decisions be worked out on political, security, socio-economic and humanitarian matters. Instead, the Ukrainian authorities, to the detriment of such dialogue, are brazenly trying to shift all discussions on the settlement process into the Normandy format, groundlessly making the conflict in eastern Ukraine out to be an inter-State conflict.

Ambassadors Grau and Çevik,

We realize that you are under pressure, not least by the host Government. At the same time, we trust that in your work you will allow yourselves to be guided exclusively by the principles of impartiality and objectivity. This concerns, among other things, the need for documents disseminated by the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk to be circulated within the TCG. Unfortunately, this does not always happen – despite the insistent requests by these representatives.

It is also important not to allow oneself to stray from one's mandate. In this regard, we are at a loss as to why, for example, the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) has taken it upon itself to study the content of domestic Russian legislation and subject it to analysis, as may be inferred from the report presented by Ambassador Çevik today. We caution against any attempts to go beyond the Mission's mandate, which tasks it with functions exclusively in relation to what is happening in Ukraine. We draw attention to the policy decision by Russia to support the extension of the SMM's mandate in March for another year without any changes to the mandate.

What is actually required is careful attention to the consequences of the Ukrainian authorities' introduction of discriminatory legislation in the linguistic, educational and other fields. After all, the SMM, in accordance with its mandate, is tasked, among other things, with "support[ing] respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms" in Ukraine. There is a need for more active and effective co-operation between the Mission and the relevant OSCE institutions: the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the Representative on Freedom of the Media and the High Commissioner on National Minorities.

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1 [https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/committee-on-foreign-affairs\\_20210413-1345-COMMITTEE-AFET\\_vd](https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/committee-on-foreign-affairs_20210413-1345-COMMITTEE-AFET_vd)

We regret that a number of events that occurred in the rest of Ukraine which have a direct bearing on the Mission's mandate were not included in the summaries of the SMM's observations and reflected in the report presented by Ambassador Çevik today. Our recommendations to pay attention to these events were not heeded by the Mission. I am referring, for example, to the attacks on clerics of the Zaporizhzhia eparchy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) that took place on 12 and 16 January; to the vandalization of two UOC houses of worship in Kharkiv on 18 and 21 January; and the attack perpetrated on 22 January by Right Sector members in the Ivano-Frankivsk region against the journalist Ruslan Kotsaba and his mother, but also against a public figure, namely Mr. Kotsaba's lawyer Tetyana Montyan. In these circumstances one may well get the impression that the Mission follows a selective approach in implementing its mandate. We call on the SMM to close these gaps, that is, from now on to carry out careful monitoring of what is going on and to reflect the data in its reports. Among other things, it is necessary to work systematically on recording all manifestations of aggressive nationalism, neo-Nazism and xenophobia. A relevant thematic report is long overdue.

We understand the difficulties encountered by the Mission during the coronavirus pandemic. In these circumstances we urge that contacts be developed with the local authorities at all levels – again, in strict accordance with the mandate. Meanwhile, it does very much seem to be the case that many complications in the SMM's work are due to a lack of co-operation with the authorities in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. This applies to establishing facts and responding promptly to incidents.

It is essential to monitor all the consequences of the socio-economic and transport blockade of Donbas that is being implemented by the Ukrainian authorities in violation of paragraph 8 of the Package of Measures. We exhort Ambassador Grau to structure the TCG's work with a view to having this inhumane blockade lifted as soon as possible.

It is important to make use of all the opportunities for early warning of a potential escalation of tensions at the line of contact and in its vicinity – to monitor carefully the military preparations of the Ukrainian armed forces and what is going on in the rear and at railway stations, through which Ukrainian weaponry, equipment and ammunition are being transferred to Donbas. We have noticed that near one such station, in Kostiantynivka, the Mission has been experiencing numerous hindrances to its monitoring activities since late March. In nearby Stepanivka a long-range unmanned aerial vehicle of the SMM has begun to experience regular strong jamming. On 2 April, the Ukrainian military did not allow the monitors to proceed to the station and inspect the loading zone. Such movements continue at other stations. A recent example is how 17 2S1 Gvozdika howitzers (of 122 mm calibre) and 11 2S3 Akatsiya howitzers (of 152 mm calibre) were spotted at Zachativka railway station (Donetsk region) on 19 April.

It is necessary to ensure implementation in good faith of the ceasefire-strengthening measures that came into effect on 27 July 2020. Tellingly, the Ukrainian Government dragged its feet for more than eight months – namely, until 7 April this year – over the publication of these measures on the website of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine. By the way, an order commanding the Ukrainian military to apply these measures has to this day not been published, whereas the authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk made corresponding orders public as early as July 2020.

It is extremely important to work on the effectiveness of execution of the aforementioned measures – including, in particular, specifying the parameters for the joint mechanism for verifying violations and monitoring the implementation of the ceasefire “through the facilitation of the Joint Centre for Control and Co-ordination in its current setting”. It is also important to ensure that effective disciplinary action is taken against those who violate the ceasefire. Ukraine's representatives are dodging all this while at the same time lobbying for some empty political declarations to be signed about the reaffirmation of commitment to the

ceasefire regime. But what is the point of that when what is required is simply to implement the July 2020 measures effectively?

Against this backdrop – that is, by invoking the lack of “complete silence” in Donbas – implementation of the political provisions of the Package of Measures is being sabotaged in Kyiv. Something else that has been scuppered is the realization of the calls from the “Normandy format” summit of 2019 to reach agreement on all the legal aspects of the special status of Donbas so that this special status takes effect on a permanent basis, and to incorporate the “Steinmeier formula” into Ukrainian legislation.

Two years ago, on 21 April 2019, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy emerged victorious in the second round of the presidential election. Upon assuming office, he gave himself one year in which to resolve the armed conflict in the east of Ukraine, determined as he was to “reach out to the hearts and minds of the people of Donbas”. In that same year, he reaffirmed at the “Normandy format” summit in Paris his commitment to the Minsk agreements as the foundation for a peaceful, political and diplomatic settlement of the conflict.

However, two years on, the conflict continues. The Ukrainian Government has so far been using only shells and bullets to try to “reach out” to the people of Donbas. According to SMM data, during the almost two years that President Zelenskyy has now been in office, more than 40 residents of Donbas on both sides of the line of contact have been killed (15 of them as a result of shelling), while over 200 have been injured. The settlements in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions have been shelled more than 150 times; over 70,000 Ukrainian shells have been fired in their direction – and this is just taking into account the SMM-confirmed data on the direction of fire. In all, the SMM has recorded more than 350,000 ceasefire violations under President Zelenskyy. Unfortunately this continues to this day.

Ambassadors Grau and Çevik,

We can see the difficulties you are having to contend with given the lack of political will in Kyiv to adhere to the letter and the spirit of the Minsk agreements. In that respect, we would stress that what is now urgently required – from you, among others – are strong signals to be sent to the Ukrainian authorities concerning the necessity of reverting to the logic of the Package of Measures. Attempts – including those undertaken by external “minders” – to shield the Ukrainian authorities as they sabotage the Minsk agreements are extremely harmful and dangerous for the whole settlement process.

In closing, we want to wish you and your colleagues robust health and success in your work.

Thank you for your attention.