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Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE
1305th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL
VIA VIDEO TELECONFERENCE**

11 March 2021

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

Madam Chairperson,

A stalemate has emerged in the settlement of the crisis in Ukraine. The reasons for this are evident – Ukraine’s representatives reject the logic of the Minsk agreements, avoid direct and meaningful dialogue with Donbas, and ignore the need for a comprehensive political settlement. Furthermore, they openly and very persistently signify their intentions to gain control, first and foremost, over the territory of Donbas, including the international border with Russia, without taking into account the legal rights and interests of the region’s residents and without any political guarantees for the population.

All things considered, exactly what conditions will be offered to the residents of Donbas after the so-called “liberation” by Ukraine can be visualized against the backdrop of the Ukrainian authorities’ campaigns of intimidation, persecution and neutralization of political opponents and the media, increased Ukrainization and pandering to the ideas of radical nationalism, along with interference in matters of faith and the rights of religious communities that refuse to participate in the politicized projects for the reshaping of church practices, and suchlike.

It is not surprising that, under these conditions, the people of Donbas are endeavouring to preserve the current scope of rights and freedoms allowing them to maintain the region’s ethnic and cultural identity following the February 2014 coup d’état in Kyiv. Nor is it surprising that the people of Donbas are seeking the swift implementation of the Minsk Package of Measures of 12 February 2015, in accordance with which the region should obtain permanent special status within Ukraine, thereby allowing it to preserve its identity.

However, this does not fit in with the concept of an ethnocratic unitary State being promoted in Kyiv today. The current Ukrainian authorities prefer to take no notice of either the residents of Donbas themselves or their representatives in the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG), surreptitiously pushing the canard about so-called “Russian aggression”. Unfortunately, Ukraine’s external “minders” are actively playing along with this. This includes, for example, the attempts made by the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, during his visit to Ukraine on 2 and 3 March to change the narrative concerning the parties to the conflict in Donbas.

Instead of working on a settlement, over in Kyiv they continue to stubbornly sabotage the implementation of the Package of Measures and constantly call for the revision of the Minsk agreements, announcing radical steps of some kind. At the same time, they themselves admit that the situation is deadlocked. Let me cite the latest comment made by the head of the delegation of Ukraine to the TCG, Leonid Kravchuk, on 5 March on a Ukrainian television channel. He said that if the Russian Federation continued to insist that it was not a party to the conflict in Donbas, then it could be said that “the situation is at a dead end, and this situation should change on the basis of new, I emphasize – new approaches and documents that we need to form and, relying on them, we need to move forward.”

We should like to ask our Ukrainian colleagues to comment on two points.

Firstly, do the Minsk agreements, which were signed by representatives of the Ukrainian leadership and the Donbas authorities and were witnessed by representatives of the OSCE and Russia, contain even a single mention of Russia as a party to the conflict in eastern Ukraine, and does the text of these agreements mention even a single obligation that the Russian Federation is supposed to fulfil?

Secondly, does the aforementioned comment by Mr. Kravchuk mean a definitive rejection of the dialogue with Donetsk and Luhansk stipulated by the Minsk Package of Measures and the actual withdrawal of the current Ukrainian authorities from the Minsk process?

It is worth recalling that, during 2020, Ukraine’s representatives were the only participants in the Minsk negotiation process who repeatedly called for a departure from the logic, letter and spirit of the Minsk agreements. Today, more than six years after the signing of the Package of Measures, it is regrettable that not one of its provisions has been fully implemented. On the contrary, the advocates of a military solution are becoming increasingly vocal – from statements by the Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, Ruslan Khomchak, about urban warfare training to the recent announcement by Valery Pospeluyko, adviser to the Minister of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, about the readiness of the security forces to implement in the near future the so-called “strategy for the de-occupation of Donbas”, to “recover the territories and ensure that any activities can be carried out there” provided they gain prior control over the border. Of course, this is in no way consistent with what is stipulated in the Package of Measures.

All this is having an extremely negative impact on the security situation in Donbas. The favourable situation that emerged following the entry into force on 27 July 2020 of measures to strengthen the ceasefire regime was not exploited properly. It appears that the Ukrainian Government’s direct dialogue with the residents of Donbas mainly takes the form of shells fired in their direction on a daily basis. We note some very worrying trends in the current circumstances. On 4 March, for the first time in more than two years, the northern suburbs of Donetsk were reportedly subjected to shelling from multiple-launch rocket systems. Apartment buildings were damaged. The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) has not reported finding any military equipment or weapons near these buildings. Reports of damage to civilian objects were reflected in its report dated 5 March. The media reported this morning that shelling had caused damage to a gas pipeline in Donetsk and a power outage at nine transformer substations. We expect the SMM to carry out, in accordance with its mandate, a detailed examination of the damage and to establish and indicate in its reports the type of weapon used and the direction of the shelling.

We have taken note of the fresh data from the SMM on the ongoing transport of Ukrainian tanks and weapons, including large-calibre ones, through railway hubs in Donbas. Over the past week alone, they spotted 45 units of weaponry. An SMM long-range unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) crashed near one of these hubs in the settlement of Kostiantynivka (Donetsk region) on 7 March (spot report dated 7 March). Almost 30 kilometres from the crash site, over territory controlled by the Ukrainian armed forces near the line of contact, the UAV’s navigation equipment was disabled. A second equipment failure occurred deep

behind Ukrainian armed forces' lines and led to the crash. We expect the Mission to investigate the incident and provide comprehensive information on what caused it.

Incidentally, what seems rather interesting in this context are the official comments by the press office of the so-called Joint Forces Operation (JFO) on the active use of electronic warfare systems by the Ukrainian armed forces in the south of the Donetsk region on 4 March (near the settlement of Pavlopil), and also the December reports of the JFO headquarters on the deployment and use of such systems west of Donetsk near the settlement of Vodiane, that is, in the immediate vicinity of the settlement of Opytne, where the SMM's UAV began to experience difficulties on 7 March.

The Ukrainian authorities continue to pander to the actions of certain regional politicians who are seeking to deepen divisions in society. Needless to say, attempts to rewrite history and glorify Nazi collaborators will not strike a chord with Donbas nor with a considerable part of the rest of the country.

On 5 March, councillors in the western Ukrainian city of Ternopil took the decision to name the city's stadium after Roman Shukhevych – Nazi accomplice, SS functionary, ideologue and one of the organizers of the massacres of Jews, Poles, Russians, Belorussians and Ukrainians during the Second World War. The Israeli ambassador to Ukraine, Joel Lion, condemned the move, calling for the decision to be reversed. The reaction of the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs is telling, since they saw fit to start telling the Israeli diplomat what he should be doing.

Once again, we note that the crisis in Ukraine is the result of the February 2014 coup d'état, which was orchestrated, funded and organized from abroad and has led to the armed confrontation in Donbas and the wholesale suffering of millions of civilians.

We expect from the OSCE Chairmanship, the Secretary General and all the structures of our Organization an objective analysis of the situation and an adequate assessment of the aforementioned alarming trends. We urge that full use be made of the functional responsibilities of the OSCE, first and foremost the Conflict Prevention Centre, in the context of the mandate on early warning and conflict prevention. We expect a more active role from the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, which, as we have repeatedly pointed out, can and should provide detailed information on what is happening both in Donbas and in the rest of the country.

We call on Ukraine's external "minders" to exert as much influence as possible on the country's leadership so as to induce the current authorities to act in the interests of peace and civil accord. The Ukrainian Government should demonstrate its commitment to the OSCE principles – not only in words but also in practice. This is important among other things for the swift achievement of peace in eastern Ukraine.

Thank you for your attention.