

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. DMITRY BALAKIN,
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RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1150th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

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

Mr. Chairperson,

The situation in Ukraine remains a cause for serious concern. The militant nationalistic agenda of the Ukrainian Government is undermining the possibility of a peaceful settlement of the internal conflict in Donbas and complicating economic, cultural and family ties between Ukraine and Russia, which both the domestic and foreign organizers and masterminds of the Maidan coup in Kyiv would very much like to sever completely. The split in Ukrainian society is growing deeper.

Contrary to the propagandistic claims by the Ukrainian representatives, Russia is not punishing Ukraine for its so-called European choice. The nationalists are managing to destabilize the country far better than any imaginary Russian “aggression” or “invasion”. There is no point in denying the existence of internal civil conflict – citizens of Ukraine stand on both sides. It is short-sighted to close one’s eyes to this and think that anything can be resolved without direct dialogue between the Ukrainian Government, Donetsk and Luhansk.

The Russian language, in which a significant proportion of the country’s population communicates, is being forced out of all spheres of public life, out of the media, out of government bodies. Among the OSCE participating States there are enough bilingual and multilingual countries that understand perfectly well how different languages can get along together in a single State.

The historical memory connected with the victory over Nazism is being distorted. Supporters and belated followers of the Nazis, who were guilty of massacring civilians on the territory of Ukraine and neighbouring countries, are heroes in modern-day Ukraine. The attempt to destroy a shared history is extremely dangerous, as is an unthinking general decommunization. The failure of the authorities to take action against the neo-Nazi Azov fighters, who, for example, on 16 June attacked a peaceful protest against the renaming of Vatutina Avenue in Kyiv, is likely to have terrible consequences. The leaders of the

neo-Nazis speak in a voice trembling with emotion in the Verkhovna Rada about a night of the long knives. The historical connotations are clear.

Attacks on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, its clergy and its property continue.

The persecution of dissidents in Ukraine has become the norm. Surveillance by intelligence services is widespread and there are denunciations, a ban on the use of Russian Internet services and social media, and an article in the Criminal Code on “domestic separatism”. The series of mysterious deaths of political and public figures, including the writer Oles Buzina, should not be forgotten. We also remember the murdered journalists – Igor Kornelyuk, Anton Voloshin, Anatoly Klyan, Andrea Rocchelli and others.

The continuation of clashes in Donbas is in the interests of the nationalistic wing of the so-called “war party”. It has no need for peace or the Minsk agreements. Nevertheless, there is no other framework for a peaceful settlement.

It became evident from the outcome of the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) meeting in Minsk that the draft law currently under discussion in Kyiv on the reintegration of Donbas makes no provision for a comprehensive political settlement of the crisis. There is no provision for the special status of Donbas or modalities for the holding of local elections, and even the Steinmeier formula has been ignored. A procedure for the implementation of point 5 of the Minsk Package of Measures to “ensure pardon and amnesty by enacting the law prohibiting the prosecution and punishment of persons in connection with the events” that took place in the conflict zone has also not been formalized.

Unfortunately, the progress of this draft law and talk about replacing the punitive operation with something else reminiscent of martial law are signs that the Ukrainian Government is still considering a military rather than a political solution to the crisis in Donbas and is attempting to alter the Minsk agreements.

We trust that the new silence regime, the establishment of which was agreed on by the parties in Minsk from 24 June, the so-called “bread” truce, will not be wrecked by the Ukrainian armed forces as usual.

Meanwhile, however, the situation in Donbas shows no sign of stabilizing. On the contrary, the Ukrainian security forces continue to provoke tension at the line of contact. The massive attack by the Ukrainian armed forces on the village of Zholobok in the Luhansk region during the TCG meeting on 7 June is clear proof of this. On the basis of satellite data, the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) confirmed that there had been around 200 artillery strikes on militia positions. The security forces continue the indiscriminate shelling of towns and villages in Donbas. According to the SMM, between 12 and 18 June alone, there were strikes from multiple-launch rocket systems (MLRS) from directions where the Ukrainian armed forces are deployed on Donetsk, Trudivske, Sakhanka, Starolaspa, Yasynuvata, Obozne and Khrystove. Three civilians were killed, three injured and a boarding school and several houses damaged as a result.

The disengagement of forces in Stanytsia Luhanska has already been postponed ten times because of the Ukrainian Government. In the early hours of 17 June, the SMM camera installed there recorded an exchange of fire, which began with firing from north to south, in other words it was initiated by the Ukrainian armed forces. The large quantity of military

equipment at the line of contact (including three MLRS and seven howitzers in Kostiantynivka, four MLRS in Stepanivka, three MLRS in Yablunivka, six howitzers in Volnovakha, four guns in Zhelanne, three howitzers and three surface-to-air missile systems in Zelene Pole, and one mortar in Novoselivka Vtoraya) and also immediately behind the withdrawal lines (the monitors observed 36 tanks and six self-propelled mortars at railway stations in Zachativka, Kostiantynivka and Khlivodarivka) is evidence that the Ukrainian armed forces are not interested in de-escalating tension.

Concerns were voiced today that monitoring of militia-controlled territory is significantly restricted compared to the other side of the line of contact. This is not consistent with the facts. If in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions the monitors encounter occasional travel bans, entire areas in Stanytsia Luhanska, Shchastia, Popasna, Bohdanivka and Katerynivka have been completely closed off to the SMM for a long time under the pretext that there is a threat of mines. The Principal Deputy Chief Monitor of the SMM, Alexander Hug, confirmed the existence of “prohibited areas” for the monitors at the briefing on 12 June.

As for the 20 June incident in Yasynuvata, according to information posted the next day on the news portals of the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics, the local security services have detained the perpetrators. According to preliminary information, the people detained were members of a Ukrainian Government forces commando, whose purpose was to try to discredit the leadership of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions and intimidate the SMM. We have repeatedly drawn attention to the increased sabotage activities by the Ukrainian armed forces in Donbas.

We trust that the Western countries will view the question of restrictions on the SMM’s freedom of movement objectively and will not try to politicize it.

In conclusion, we once again call on the States that have influence on the Ukrainian Government to use it with a view to a swift settlement of the Ukrainian crisis on the basis of the Minsk agreements, which will undoubtedly also have a positive impact on the general climate of security and co-operation in the OSCE area.

Thank you for your attention.