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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1221st MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

28 March 2019

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

Mr. Chairperson,

The situation in Ukraine continues to deteriorate. There is no sign of any effort by the Ukrainian authorities to normalize the situation in Donbas and in the country as a whole. They are counting on further intimidation of the population for opportunistic political purposes.

According to the estimates by the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), the effect of the “spring truce” in Donbas was one of the shortest in the entire history of announcing such ceasefires – only three days, during which the intensity of the shelling decreased by 61 per cent. However, since 11 March the total number of ceasefire violations has returned to the February levels. Damage to civilian infrastructure facilities – houses in Zaitseve, Yasynuvata, Sakhanka and Zolote-5/Mykhailovka – has been recorded again. Functioning schools in the village of Holmivskyi and in the Petrovsky district of Donetsk also came under attack on 20 March and 21 March respectively. The latter came under heavy-machine-gun fire at a time when children were in the classroom. It was a miracle that no one was injured.

The SMM data testifies to the deteriorating situation in all three disengagement areas. Violations have become more frequent in Stanytsia Luhanska (15, 18, 21 and 22 March), and the SMM has recorded almost daily skirmishes in Zolote, where the Ukrainian armed forces have noticeably strengthened their positions (three Ukrainian BMP-1 and one BMP-2 armoured infantry fighting vehicles were spotted there on 20 March). It is hardly surprising that a record number of ceasefire violations – over 500 – were reported inside the Zolote disengagement area the next day. The situation in Petrivske is no better – Ukrainian armed forces have strengthened their positions there with personnel and equipment, as can be seen from the Mission report dated 20 March. These facts show that the Ukrainian Government is determined to completely disrupt the implementation of the Trilateral Contact Group’s Framework Decision on Disengagement of Forces and Hardware of 21 September 2016. The

failure to comply with this decision in the aforementioned three areas also makes it impossible to begin disengagement along the entire line of contact.

Instead of taking steps towards de-escalation the Ukrainian armed forces continue to provoke tension. The delivery of heavy equipment to the railway stations in Kostiantynivka, Zachativka and Khlibodariivka has continued. The SMM noted a large number of mines laid out at Ukrainian armed forces' positions in the Donetsk region near Vodiane (350 TM-62 mines were spotted there for the first time on 13 March) and near Novoselivka (minefields consisting of 900 TM-62 mines were discovered on 18 March) – all this is in violation of the Minsk agreements and the Trilateral Contact Group's Decision on Mine Action of 3 March 2016.

The Ukrainian authorities' attempt to open a checkpoint unilaterally in Zolote is further eloquent testimony to the Ukrainian Government's focus on provocations likely to result in casualties among the civilian population. Not wanting to have a meaningful discussion in the Trilateral Contact Group about the opening of new checkpoints, the Ukrainian authorities decided literally to send civilians into a minefield – it was proposed that people cross through territory that had not been demined. The Ukrainian armed forces also brought a ZU-23 anti-aircraft gun into the area (SMM report dated 25 March). Another provocation is the Ukrainian Government's plans for the supposed repair of the bridge in Stanytsia Luhanska. I would remind you that the Ukrainian representatives have been "dragging out" this issue for more than two years in the Trilateral Contact Group, constantly changing their demands as regards the width of the bridge. Now, however, they are proposing that the militia simply leave their positions, and the Ukrainian armed forces move forward under the pretext of repairing the bridge. What about the Framework Decision on Disengagement of Forces and Hardware that stipulates the concurrency of the parties' actions in this process?

The political settlement is also completely "frozen", as can be seen from the results of yesterday's meetings in Minsk of the participants in the Trilateral Contact Group and its working groups. The Ukrainian authorities are putting off indefinitely the adoption of amendments to the Constitution regarding decentralization, which are stipulated by the Minsk Package of Measures, and the law on an amnesty for the participants in the events in Donbas has not entered into force. Contrary to the provisions of the Package of Measures, Ukraine has not made the law on the special status of Donbas permanent (it will expire on 31 December 2019). The Ukrainian Government is doing all it can to avoid reaching an agreement on the procedure for the entry into force of the aforementioned law under the Steinmeier formula. In fact, the authorities in Kyiv are disrupting the implementation of the decisions of the "Normandy summits" in Paris (2015) and Berlin (2016).

Under these circumstances, the Ukrainian leadership is not just ratcheting up its bellicose rhetoric, but also continuing to arm itself. Turkish Bayraktar TB2 unmanned combat aerial vehicles (UCAVs) arrived in Ukraine in early March. A week ago, the President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko attended the testing of these UCAVs. There was no hiding the fact that they will be used in Donbas. We remind you of the danger of supporting the "hotheads" in Kyiv, who are determined to solve the "Donbas problem" by military force. Responsibility for the fresh casualties and destruction that the lethal weapons being delivered to Ukraine are capable of causing also lies with those who supplied these weapons.

In violation of the Minsk agreements, the Ukrainian authorities continue to fly combat aircraft and deploy unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) near the line of contact, notably for purposes of provocation. On 25 March, SMM monitors saw a Mi-8 helicopter flying at a low altitude near Kapitanove in the Luhansk region, and also three Ukrainian soldiers launching a UAV in Stanytsia Luhanska. A few days ago, Donetsk militia reported that they had downed a Ukrainian UAV over their territory with two 82 mm mines attached to it. Analysis of the video material shot by the UAV indicated that it was used to record the routes of the SMM patrols. Such surveillance is an indication of gross interference in the Mission's activities and the consideration of scenarios for hindering the implementation of its mandate. The mines attached to the drone clearly did not bode well – the SMM monitors themselves could well have been their victims.

Profiteering from the war against its own citizens seems to be becoming an established practice in Ukraine. We have taken note of the reports in the press about a proposal by a major tour company in the United States of America to arrange visits for paying customers to the zone of military operations in Donbas. Anyone can go there, including children from the age of two. Just think how cynical this is. People are being given an opportunity to pay to see the destruction of civilian infrastructure facilities. This kind of business “in blood” in areas of Donbas, where there is a special procedure for the movement of civilians, would be impossible without the go-ahead from the Ukrainian authorities.

Mr. Chairperson,

Vasily Prozorov, a former officer of the Ukrainian Security Service who recently arrived in Russia from Ukraine, confirmed that since 2014 the Azov battalion (incidentally just like the Ukrainian Security Service itself) has had its “secret prisons” in Donbas. Brutal torture is employed in these prisons. The “Maidan” authorities knew about their existence, but did nothing to stop the lawlessness. No one was held accountable. Let us remember what kind of battalion this is. Not only was it not disbanded by the Ukrainian authorities, but on the contrary it was incorporated into the country's Ministry of Internal Affairs. This is the same battalion whose banners show the “black sun” symbol used by the Nazis and the emblem of the SS tank division “Das Reich” – the so-called Wolfsangel (Wolf's Hook).

And the point is not so much that certain nationalist battalions use Nazi symbols in their emblems, but that they do so with the complete support of the Ukrainian authorities, which in order to please them are busy rewriting history and trying to present black as white and white as black. Modern young Ukrainians are being brought up in this aggressive way of thinking. Let me give you just a couple of examples. The day before yesterday, a law entered into force in Ukraine glorifying Nazi accomplices from among the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army and other Ukrainian nationalist formations during the Second World War. Now they have the status of combatants and the corresponding privileges. On 18 March, the local authorities attended the unveiling of a monument to Ukrainian collaborators and members of the Nazi Nachtigall (Nightingale) battalion in the village of Bohorodchany in the Ivano-Frankivsk region. And this is against the backdrop of the removal by the authorities in early March of a memorial in Lviv to those who fought against Nazism. Do the Ukrainian authorities really intend to look for ways of nationwide reconciliation and to win over the people of Donbas through such methods?

The Ukrainian authorities and intelligence services are also continuing to exert unprecedented pressure on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC). In March alone, there

have been 62 recorded cases of the appropriation of UOC places of worship and parishes. In the process, in 49 of these cases, UOC parishioners had to go to court to get agreement from the police to register their statements about the crimes.

Mr. Chairperson,

Unfortunately, Ukraine has long been living outside the framework of the law. Since the moment armed radicals seized power in Kyiv in 2014, there can be no talk of the principles of legality being observed there. The manipulation of this country by the main “sponsors of the Maidan” is not likely to bring about a normalization of the situation either. Just look at the admission by the Prosecutor General of Ukraine, Yuriy Lutsenko, that the US ambassador handed him a list of “untouchables” who were not to be prosecuted or investigated. These, it seems, are the recipes for “fighting” corruption that have been proposed to Ukraine.

In the current conditions, the only path to a normalization of the situation, restoration of Ukrainian unity and establishment of legality is the implementation of the Minsk Package of Measures of 12 February 2015, endorsed by the United Nations Security Council. All international partners need to work seriously with the Ukrainian authorities to encourage the Government of Ukraine to fulfil its obligations. It should use all the opportunities available to find mutually acceptable solutions through direct, honest and responsible dialogue with the authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk. The more the Ukrainian Government ploughs on regardless, the smaller the “window of opportunity” for this becomes.

Thank you for your attention.