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**STATEMENT BY
MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH, PERMANENT
REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE
1069th (SPECIAL) MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

28 September 2015

**In response to the remarks by the
Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine and
in the Trilateral Contact Group, Ambassador Martin Sajdik**

Mr. Chairperson,
Ambassador Sajdik,

We are grateful for the detailed report on the work of the Trilateral Contact Group and the meetings of its specialist subgroups. We appreciate your contribution and the efforts of the subgroup co-ordinators in assisting the parties in their search for mutually acceptable solutions in implementing the Minsk Package of Measures. There is no alternative to the full implementation of that document in good faith. A settlement in Ukraine can be ensured solely by peaceful, political means, through direct dialogue between the parties to the conflict.

This dialogue must be as substantive as possible, with a clear focus on further de-escalation of tension and the conversion of all steps provided for in Minsk into “facts on the ground”. Unfortunately, much time has been lost because of Kyiv’s stubborn unwillingness to engage in this direct dialogue and its various far-fetched pretexts for avoiding seeking joint solutions together with the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk.

The relative stabilization of the situation in Donbas offers a chance to achieve real progress in the negotiation process. It is important not to squander this chance. If the Ukrainian authorities were to put an end to their so-called counter-terrorism operation, which has led to countless victims, destruction and a flood of displaced persons, this would be a positive step that would enable work to begin on dealing with its consequences and on a return to normal, peaceful life in Donbas.

We trust that a final agreement on the withdrawal from the line of contact of tanks and weapons under 100 mm in calibre will at last be reached with as little delay as possible. It would neatly supplement Point 2 of the Package of Measures regarding the withdrawal of heavy weapons, which should be rigorously respected. The experience of negotiations on the demilitarization of Shyrokyne should not be forgotten either. We are confident that the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) will be able to help ensure implementation of

these measures through massive patrolling in the security zone and permanent observation posts on the line of contact.

Other steps aimed at ensuring the safety of civilians would also be useful. We agree with Mr. Sajdik that the danger of mines and the absence of, or unwillingness to provide, maps of minefields already in place pose a serious threat.

We welcome the increased consultations within the subgroup on political issues. I am hopeful that agreements will be reached soon on modalities for the holding of local elections in Donbas in line with the known requirements of the Package of Measures.

As for the reaction of our colleagues to the preparations by Donetsk and Luhansk for the elections of some local government bodies, to judge by statements made by representatives of these regions, they do not at all rule out the holding of elections under Ukrainian law in accordance with the relevant OSCE standards and monitored by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). The Package of Measures does not set a date for the local elections, which according to Minsk II should be agreed upon through joint efforts, nor does it prohibit the Donetsk and Luhansk authorities from organizing elections, if the objective situation in the region requires this, but Kyiv stubbornly disregards the possibility of dialogue.

Today, we have once again heard crude attacks against the heads of the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) and accusations about their alleged "illegitimacy". I might recall that the DPR and LPR leaders, following persistent demands on the part of the President of Ukraine, signed the Minsk Package of Measures and are participants in the negotiations with a view to implementing that document, but the current Kyiv authorities still stubbornly refuse to engage in direct dialogue with Donbas or resolve practical issues in co-ordination with the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in order to advance the political process, establish peace and facilitate the social and economic reconstruction of the region.

We recall that concrete proposals regarding the law on local elections were presented by Donetsk and Luhansk several months ago. There has been more than enough time to digest these proposals. Unfortunately, instead of constructive discussion of these proposals within the Contact Group, Kyiv continued to engage in dialogue all by itself to buy time. It was not Donbas but Kyiv that refused to hold local elections in certain areas of that region, including those controlled by the central authorities. It was Kyiv and not Donbas that restricted the area in which the ODIHR observers could work, although funding for the organization of monitoring was allocated back in August by a Permanent Council decision. It was Kyiv and not Donbas that repealed all the substantive provisions of the law on a special procedure in certain regions, introducing artificial linkages that have not been agreed upon with their representatives.

A persistent unwillingness to implement the Minsk agreements, agree to any elections in Donbas or permanent legislation on its special status, or carry out constitutional reform and grant an amnesty is clearly audible in the complaints about the alleged failure of the Minsk agreements. Of course, many in Kyiv would be relieved if the Minsk agreements could be repealed.

This is quite extraordinary in the light of the attempts to pass off proposed amendments to the Ukrainian Constitution submitted to the Verkhovna Rada as measures implementing the Minsk agreements. Amendments that concern Donetsk and Luhansk were not agreed upon with them. Consequently, this “manoeuvre” is not in keeping with the Minsk agreements.

Is there still a chance of implementing the agreements by the end of the year? Evidently, yes. However, if Kyiv continues the line it has taken in the negotiations, we will not see results any time soon. It will be extremely difficult to keep to the deadlines set.

I should like to say a few words about the pardon and amnesty through the entry into force of a law prohibiting the prosecution and punishment of persons in connection with the events that took place in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine (Point 5 of the Package of Measures). Regardless of how painful this may be for the inhabitants of Donbas who have suffered as a result of the “counter-terrorism” operation, this is a necessary condition for national reconciliation.

We support continued co-operation between the parties in the exchange of prisoners and unlawfully detained persons. However, it is important here not only to release people but also to ensure that they are legally “cleared” in the eyes of the law. The amnesty law would solve this problem as well.

Dialogue within the subgroups on humanitarian and economic issues has a direct effect on the situation of the population in the affected regions. We firmly believe that much more could be done here. First and foremost, the blockade of Donbas needs to be lifted. In addition to the inherently inhumane nature of this measure, it also has a pronounced criminal dimension in connection with the extortion of money from those supplying goods. One clear example of this is the blocking by extremist groups of food deliveries to Crimea. A surprising tactic, one would think – cutting off food and water from people whom Kyiv continues to call Ukrainian citizens and urges to live in a “unified country”. However, behind these empty political slogans perhaps there are real economic benefits to be obtained from redistributing market supply.

As for the possibility of setting up a fifth subgroup on border issues, I am obliged once again to remind our colleagues of Point 9 of the Package of Measures, which states that this matter should be deferred until there is a comprehensive political settlement of the crisis. We are still a long way off from this.

In conclusion, I should like to wish Mr. Sajdik every success in his very important work and urge our Ukrainian colleagues to cease their rhetoric and move forward at last to direct, practical dialogue with Donetsk and Luhansk. We trust that if the United States of America and the European Union are truly interested in a peaceful settlement in Ukraine, they will send the necessary signals to Kyiv.

Thank you for your attention.