

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
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AT THE 1217th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

14 February 2019

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

Mr. Chairperson,

On 12 February, we marked the fourth anniversary of the signing of the Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements in the Belarusian capital by the representatives of the OSCE, Ukraine and the Russian Federation and the leaders of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine. That document, which became the “road map” for an internal Ukrainian settlement, was endorsed on 17 February 2015 by United Nations Security Council resolution 2202. Support for the document was reiterated in the statement by the President of the Security Council of 6 June 2018. So no matter how much the Ukrainian Government disputes this, it is an element of international law.

In view of this anniversary, Russia initiated a briefing at the UN Security Council in New York on 13 February 2019, which proved to be extremely useful from the point of view of understanding what is happening in Ukraine. Also telling were the remarks by the Chief Monitor of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), Ertuğrul Apakan, who did not confirm the Ukrainian fabrications about “Russian forces” in Ukraine. We believe that it is also important for the OSCE Permanent Council to refresh its memory of the provisions of the Minsk Package of Measures (copies of which you have before you on the table).

It must be said that, after four years, the situation in south-eastern Ukraine is far from stable. Not a single point of the Minsk Package of Measures, beginning with the first one (and this refers to an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire), has been properly implemented as yet. It is not surprising therefore that there is still no serious progress in the settlement of the internal Ukrainian crisis.

Ukraine has been in a state of domestic political unrest for a long time now. It began with the blatant meddling by a number of Western countries in the internal affairs of the country in 2013 and 2014 – the activities of radicals were directed and supported to seize power at the cost of any (including bloody) provocations. The agreement of

21 February 2014 between the then leadership of Ukraine and the protest leaders, which was reached as a result of a difficult compromise, was already being flouted by the radical nationalists the very next day. The European “pseudo-guarantors” for its implementation (and I am referring to the Foreign Ministers of Germany, France and Poland) immediately washed their hands of this and conveniently recognized the unconstitutional change of power. They preferred to simply forget about the agreement, as if it had never existed. But by no means all of Ukraine’s citizens were happy to go along with the coup d’état. There was a wave of protests in the south-east of the country. The Maidan authorities decided to pacify the disgruntled citizens with the aid of the security forces and armed units of radical nationalists. This was the starting point for the beginning of armed confrontation in Donbas.

In this situation, the signing of the Minsk Package of Measures became an important restraining measure that prevented the Ukrainian Government from drowning certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in blood.

However, in practice, the leadership of Ukraine is simply going through the motions of fulfilling its commitments, and it is openly sabotaging some of them (with the connivance of its foreign sponsors). This applies not only to the Package of Measures itself, but also to the decisions of the Minsk Trilateral Contact Group adopted in its wake – on the withdrawal of weapons, disengagement of forces and hardware, prohibiting live-fire exercises, and demining. All of this is confirmed by the observations of the SMM. The Ukrainian armed forces constantly provoke shelling, strengthening their positions in response, and filling areas close to the line of contact with military equipment. Their advancing deep inside the “grey zones” has already resulted in the sides’ positions moving dangerously close to one another. Heavy artillery is being used once more. The Ukrainian armed forces use unmanned aerial vehicles to adjust the line of fire in violation of the Minsk agreements. The 14 truces agreed upon by the parties in the Trilateral Contact Group have still not resulted in a sustainable “silence regime”. Over the past two weeks, the SMM reported some 10,000 violations of the ceasefire regime. This morning (14 February), the Ukrainian armed forces subjected Donbas territory to extremely intensive mortar shelling (more than 100 mortar shells were unleashed on the suburbs of Donetsk in just one hour).

It is the Ukrainian Government’s fault that nothing has been done as regards a political settlement. There has been no constitutional reform with new elements on decentralization (Point 11 of the Minsk Package of Measures). Permanent legislation has not been adopted on the special status of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions (in line with the right to linguistic self-determination). The so-called law on the status of Donbas approved by the Verkhovna Rada is temporary in nature and in no way covers the implementation of the aforementioned Point 11 of the Minsk Package of Measures. The law on amnesty for the participants in events in Donbas (Point 5 of the Minsk Package of Measures) has not entered into force. The Ukrainian Government is demonstratively avoiding setting out in writing the compromise version for the entry into force of the special status of Donbas proposed by Germany – the Steinmeier formula. It has been agreed upon twice by the leaders of the Normandy Quartet at summits in Paris (2015) and Berlin (2016). The Ukrainian law on the so-called reintegration of Donbas, which devalues the Minsk agreements, entered into force in February of last year. There has been no progress in the exchange of detained persons between the Ukrainian Government and the authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk (Point 6 of the Minsk Package of Measures). The inhumane trade, economic, transport and social blockade of Donbas, which is in gross violation of Point 8 of the Minsk Package of Measures, continues. It is precisely this that is largely responsible for

the suffering of the people who spend hours waiting in freezing temperatures to cross the line of contact. But none of the speakers today had the courage to say this.

Mr. Chairperson,

Yesterday's meeting of the Trilateral Contact Group once again demonstrated the unwillingness of the Ukrainian negotiators to find mutually acceptable solutions. The situation in Donbas, and with it the entire population of the region, have in fact become hostages to the political campaign in Kyiv ahead of the elections. This means some 4 million citizens of Ukraine. The Ukrainian leadership is developing aggressive rhetoric towards that region, seeing the implementation of the Minsk agreements as a threat to its own political future. Those who publicly advocate the rapid implementation of the Package of Measures find themselves facing criminal prosecution for treason and separatism.

In trying to justify their actions, the Ukrainian authorities are stubbornly imposing on the citizens of their own country and the international community a false paradigm about some kind of "Russian aggression" and "occupation". To cover up their own failures, they are trying to present our country as a participant in the events in Donbas. Unfortunately, the representatives of a number of Western countries are actively involved in this disinformation campaign. They repeatedly call on Russia to fulfil certain "commitments under the Minsk agreements". In that context, there are also references to Crimea and the Sea of Azov, which as a matter of principle have nothing to do with the Minsk agreements.

Once again, we urge that the Minsk Package of Measures be studied carefully. It provides for obligations by the parties – the Ukrainian Government and the authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk – to take reciprocal steps in the political, security, humanitarian and socio-economic spheres. There is no mention in the Minsk agreements about any obligations on the part of Russia. Attempts to fudge the facts and offload onto our country responsibility for the "stalling" of the Minsk agreements only encourage the Ukrainian leadership to take new risks, make the real prospect of a settlement less likely and doom the inhabitants of Donbas to fresh suffering.

Mr. Chairperson,

The excesses of radical nationalism in Ukraine and the Ukrainian Government's attacks on fundamental human rights and freedoms have taken on threatening proportions. This is reported by international and non-governmental organizations. In the recent 24th report by the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, there was reference to the increase in radical and extremist attitudes in Ukrainian society, cases of persecution and attacks on journalists, civil society activists and members of the opposition with the complicity of the authorities and law enforcement officers. The day before yesterday, the term of detention for the head of the RIA Novosti Ukraine news portal, Kirill Vyshinsky, detained on trumped-up charges was extended once more. We note in that connection the prompt response by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Harlem Désir, who called on the Ukrainian Government to release the Russian journalist.

Last week, Amnesty International released its report evaluating the situation in Ukraine in 2018. It also mentions the rise in extremist manifestations against the background of the authorities' failure to prevent or investigate numerous human rights violations. It notes the surge in attacks on members of ethnic minorities, human rights defenders and media

workers. It makes reference to the fact that a number of crimes were committed before the eyes of the law enforcement authorities.

It is not surprising that on 9 February, a group of radical nationalists armed with knives and pepper spray stormed a police station in the Podil district of Kyiv. They were driven back. However, for some reason, the police officers felt they had to apologize to the head of the Kyiv police for the actions of the law enforcement officers who defended their secure facility from the unlawful entry of outsiders and pushed the radicals out onto the street. The attackers who were detained were released the next day. Furthermore, following these events, some police officers took part in the “I am Bandera” flash mob – some of them were forced to do this, others did so out of conviction. This is how tightly the nationalists control the activities of the law enforcement agencies.

The Ukrainian Government continues to disregard fundamental OSCE election commitments. We recall that the Ukrainian authorities first took the discriminatory decision to prevent Russian citizens from monitoring the presidential election on 31 March, and on 7 February formalized this ban in the form of the relevant law. Despite the insistent calls by the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Miroslav Lajčák, the Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir, and even some of the Ukrainian Government’s Western supporters, such violations continue, which calls into question the legitimacy of future elections. At the same time, Russia remains willing to send short-term observers to Ukraine as part of the ODIHR/OSCE Parliamentary Assembly mission.

The continuing attacks on religious freedom also indicate the true level of “democracy” in Ukraine. Evidently, in Kyiv, they do not know that in modern democratic countries it is not customary for the State to interfere in church affairs, force church bodies to change their name or facilitate the forcible removal of churches from certain religious organizations in favour of others. Yet in Ukraine, heads of rural territorial communities are given instructions (and this includes the handing out of prepared statements) on how to organize the “correct” procedure for transition to the new church structure created by the authorities themselves. Dummy “local community meetings” are organized to change the jurisdiction of parishes. Such events have taken place recently in the village of Zolochivka in the Rivne region, in the village of Zadubrivka in the Chernihiv region, and in the village of Ustivitsa in the Poltava region. And these are just a few examples.

Of course, against the background of the inability or unwillingness of the Ukrainian authorities to deal with domestic problems, the Ukrainian Government’s bellicose rhetoric towards Donbas is not conducive to achieving national consensus. However, we recall that there is a path to peace in Ukraine. It lies in direct dialogue between the Ukrainian Government and the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk and in strict implementation of the provisions of the Minsk Package of Measures, which is the only internationally recognized framework for a peaceful, political and diplomatic settlement of the crisis in Ukraine. Attempts to distort the essence of that document are inadmissible.

We call on our Western partners to use all their influence on the Ukrainian Government to encourage it to stop its unconstructive propagandist rhetoric and begin real steps towards de-escalation and a resolution of the internal Ukrainian crisis.

Thank you for your attention.