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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1197th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

11 October 2018

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

Mr. Chairperson,

The Ukrainian authorities are stepping up the anti-Russian hysteria as the presidential election draws closer. The reason for this is clear: the current Ukrainian Government has proven incapable of resolving the country's serious internal problems and is trying to divert attention from them, secure support from abroad and do things just for show. The Verkhovna Rada's decision to extend by a year the temporary Law on Special Status is being presented as a step towards implementing the Minsk Package of Measures, when it is, in reality, nothing of the sort. Point 11 of the Package of Measures, agreed in Minsk and endorsed by United Nations Security Council resolution 2202, states directly the need to adopt permanent, and not temporary, legislation on the special status of the region. This status must be enshrined in the Ukrainian Constitution and the actual law on a special status must be agreed upon with the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk.

Instead of pursuing dialogue, the Ukrainian Government is taking the road of aggressive nationalism and total Ukrainization. This is reproducing the causes that were at the root of the conflict in eastern Ukraine. On 4 October, the Verkhovna Rada approved in the first reading a draft law on guaranteeing the functioning of the Ukrainian language as the State language. This law seeks to squeeze out the Russian language and the languages of national minorities from all areas of the Ukrainian linguistic space. Its provisions would result in a near total cleansing of the education space of all languages except for Ukrainian, English and the official languages of the European Union Member States. Bleak prospects lie ahead for culture, including exhibitions, museums, film screenings and theatre performances. The healthcare system, court proceedings, and the media are also being artificially driven into this linguistic "ghetto". Ukrainians are *de facto* being divided into Ukrainian-speaking citizens and "pariahs", whose opportunities for study, medical care and use of other social services will be greatly restricted. The new law will establish a commissioner for the protection of the Ukrainian language to oversee the implementation of these discriminatory measures, with the right to initiate sanctions. Essentially, use of the Russian language has been declared a crime.

This grossly violates Chapter 3, Article 10, of the Ukrainian Constitution, which states that “free development, use and protection of the Russian language and the languages of national minorities shall be guaranteed in Ukraine”, Article 6 of the Ukrainian Law on National Minorities, which guarantees free use of the native language in culture, the media, education and other areas of public life, and also Point 11 of the Package of Measures, which stipulates carrying out constitutional reform and adopting permanent legislation on the special status of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, in accordance with the right to linguistic self-determination. The Ukrainian Government is clearly violating the commitments it assumed at the CSCE/OSCE meetings in Copenhagen and Paris in 1990, Geneva in 1991, Istanbul in 1999 and others. The Ukrainian authorities are also clearly ignoring the recommendations of the Council of Europe’s Venice Commission regarding the Law on Education.

The Ukrainian Government continues its discrimination against national minorities. Just recently, the Mirotvorets website, which radicals use to persecute dissidents, added the names of 300 ethnic Hungarians living in the Zakarpattia region.

An aggressive campaign against the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church is under way. There are open attempts to encourage a split within the Church, which would threaten Ukraine’s national unity.

Media freedom continues to face restrictions and journalists continue to be persecuted. The editor-in-chief of RIA Novosti Ukraine, Kirill Vyshinsky, remains under arrest on trumped-up charges. We again call on the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Harlem Désir, to keep his attention focused on this issue, and we call on the Ukrainian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release this journalist.

The Ukrainian representatives are trying to avoid discussing the issues of genuine relevance to reaching a settlement through the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) in Minsk, which is the only platform for direct dialogue between the parties in the internal Ukrainian conflict – the Ukrainian Government, Donetsk and Luhansk. At the meeting on 2 October, the Ukrainian negotiators again refused to put down on paper the “Steinmeier formula”, which links conducting local elections and constitutional reform. No progress has been made on discussing an amnesty.

The security track is also at a standstill. The Ukrainian Government is not ready to disengage forces and hardware at Stanytsia Luhanska and challenges the information from the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) confirming respect for the seven-day local ceasefires – the condition for the withdrawal to begin. This is despite the fact that SMM has already confirmed respect for the seven-day periods on 55 occasions. On 5 October, the SMM monitors saw that the militia at the bridge in Stanytsia Luhanska gave the signal that they were ready to start the disengagement, but no response followed from the Ukrainian armed forces.

The policy of aggressive nationalism, propagandistic rhetoric and stalling the negotiations in Minsk can be put down to the fact that the Ukrainian Government remains intent on settling the conflict through military means. The Ukrainian armed forces are building up military capability along the line of contact. The SMM spotted BUK surface-to-air missile systems – 12 such systems – at the railway station in Kostiantynivka (4 October), and the transfer by railway, via the station of Rubizhne, of ten 220-mm calibre

Uragan multiple-launch rocket systems (8 October). The Ukrainian security forces are using civilian and demilitarized objects for military purposes.

To prevent further escalation in Donbas, additional security measures are needed, including the disengagement of forces, the withdrawal of weapons from residential areas and civilian infrastructure, the publication of ceasefire orders, guaranteed disciplinary measures for violators and a ban on commando and reconnaissance action. We call on the SMM to step up its monitoring of the situation along the line of contact and report promptly on shelling and military deployments.

Serious humanitarian problems arising from the Ukrainian Government's trade and transport blockade, the checkpoint regime and the cessation of pension payments remain unresolved in Donbas. In its weekly report of 10 October (SEC.FR/696/18), the SMM notes that the legal restrictions imposed by the Ukrainian Government force elderly people living in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions to register as internally displaced persons (IDPs) and travel to government-controlled territory once every 60 days, in order to collect their pensions. Four elderly people died while waiting in queues to cross the line of contact in the summer of 2018 alone. Officials from the Kharkhiv pension fund admitted that pension payments were stopped for 1,200 of the 3,100 pensioners registered as IDPs because they did not come in time to confirm their registration.

Crossing the line of contact at Stanytsia Luhanska remains a problem too. The Ukrainian armed forces destroyed the bridge across the river at the start of the conflict. Now, the Ukrainian negotiators are blocking agreement of a proposal made by the International Committee of the Red Cross to repair the bridge, making it possible for ambulances to use it. The SMM has also drawn attention to the needs of residents of Chihari, which the Ukrainian armed forces seized earlier this year. Ambulances are prohibited from being used there, which means that seriously ill people are having to be transported to medical facilities using wheelchairs or stretchers.

In this way, Ukraine's actions are making ever more remote the prospects for an end to the conflict and are deepening the internal State contradictions. It is therefore vital now for the OSCE to send a collective signal to the Ukrainian Government on the need to implement the Minsk Package of Measures as the only possible road map for a settlement.

Thank you for your attention.