

PC.DEL/310/17
10 March 2017

ENGLISH
Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1136th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

9 March 2017

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

Mr. Chairperson,

The situation in the conflict zone in Donbas is cause for serious concern. The Ukrainian authorities are clearly unwilling to stabilize the situation and agree to the establishment of a ceasefire regime and the withdrawal of heavy weapons from the line of contact. Repeated proposals received from Donetsk and Luhansk in this regard, including those from last weekend, have been ignored. Ukraine has already routinely disrupted the disengagement of forces in the Stanytsia Luhanska area, which was scheduled for 7 March.

The shelling of militia-controlled territory, including critical infrastructure facilities, continues. On 24 February, mortar shelling of the Donetsk filtration plant by the Ukrainian armed forces resulted in damage to the chlorine storage building. An unmanned aerial vehicle belonging to the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) was even shot down. There are no militia military facilities in the vicinity of the Donetsk filtration plant. Operation of the plant resumed yesterday, and the electricity supply to Avdiivka was restored. However, we cannot be certain that the Ukrainian forces will not subject the plant to shelling again. The purpose of this shelling is to maintain tension and provoke retaliation. We remember our Western colleagues' calls for agreement to be reached on a mechanism to prevent such incidents. The best mechanism is to force the Ukrainian Government to implement its commitments regarding the withdrawal of heavy weapons from the line of contact.

According to the SMM, there have been twice as many victims recently among the civilian population in militia-controlled territory than in the adjacent areas. Just from the latest reports: on 2 March, Zolote-5 was shelled. Incidentally, that is where there are plans to open a new crossing point on the line of contact. On 3 March, three apartment buildings in Donetsk suffered serious damage. On 4 March, the living quarters of a Russian officer of the Joint Centre for Control and Co-ordination (JCCC) in Oleksandrivka were damaged by a mortar round, and facilities were shelled in Dokuchaievsk and Dachne. On 5 March, there was an artillery strike on Kominternove. On 7 March, a resident of Dokuchaievsk was injured, four houses were damaged in Horlivka, and Stakhanov, Donetsk and Pervomaisk

were shelled. Data from surveillance cameras once again – just as with the attack by the Ukrainian armed forces near Avdiivka at the end of January – first records rounds fired from Ukrainian armed forces’ positions, and then an exchange of gunfire begins.

The Ukrainian armed forces are maintaining a significant presence near the line of contact – 74 armoured personnel carriers were discovered this week, and 71 units of military equipment were spotted immediately behind the withdrawal lines. Less than 6 per cent of the military equipment that is meant to have been withdrawn is to be found in the Ukrainian armed forces’ storage sites.

There are no signs that the Ukrainian Government has abandoned its tactic of a “sweeping offensive” and the subsequent seizure of territory between the parties’ positions on the line of contact. Evidently, it is not going to abandon its plans of seizing all of Donbas by force either.

The situation is aggravated by the Donbas trade embargo, which the Ukrainian Government simply does not want to deal with. Among those responsible for the embargo are members of the Verkhovna Rada and nationalists such as Right Sector, whose participation in the blockade has been recorded by the SMM. At the last meeting of the Normandy quartet, Ukraine paid lip service to the lifting of the blockade; in practice, nothing has happened. Furthermore, there has been an attempt to cut Ukrainian coal consumers off from supplies from the Russian Federation. The Ukrainian Minister of Internal Affairs, Arsen Avakov, is calling for the burden on the country’s economy to be increased even further by a ban on the activities of Russian banks in Ukraine. An increase in internal political troubles in Ukraine is usually followed by an escalation of the situation at the line of contact.

We have still not heard the official Ukrainian version of what is happening with the railway crossings at the line of contact. Is this a violation of Ukrainian law or not? Is this supported by the country’s leadership or not? Do the authorities intend to do anything about this or not?

The SMM has a particular responsibility under these conditions. We are awaiting a prompt, objective and impartial report on events from the SMM, setting out what has been observed. Attention should undoubtedly be focused on patrolling the line of contact, disengagement areas and entry/exit points. We consider it inappropriate to reduce the frequency of patrols as a result of a reduction in the number of monitors in the field. The use of technical equipment cannot replace people’s work on the ground. We appreciate the SMM’s efforts in facilitating the restoration of infrastructure.

The safety of the monitors remains our top priority. The Mission needs to work harder to win the trust of the parties on both sides of the line of contact. Firing shots in the vicinity of SMM patrols, damaging their equipment, checking the monitors’ passports, accusing them of working for intelligence agencies and similar actions must stop. The blame for this cannot be pinned on the militia. On 3 March, members of the Ukrainian armed forces threatened to shoot the tyres of an SMM vehicle in Troitske, and a drone belonging to the SMM was shot down near the Donetsk filtration plant.

Problems regarding the SMM’s freedom to carry out patrols remain on both sides. We have noted the tactics of the Ukrainian security forces, which close off routes they do not want the SMM patrols to use with mine warning signs, for example in the vicinity of

Stanytsia Luhanska, Shchastia and Katerynivka. For quite some time now, monitors have not been admitted to a number of weapons storage facilities belonging to the Ukrainian armed forces.

Intensifying contacts on the ground would help to improve the quality of the SMM's work, its ability to enter sites, as well as the safety of its monitors. It is important to improve interaction with the commanders on both sides of the line of contact, with the local authorities in Donbas at all levels and with the JCCC. Resumed participation of the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk in the JCCC's work is long overdue. The obstacles created to this by Ukraine have significantly impaired the JCCC's ability to perform its tasks.

The SMM should itself work more actively with the local media in Donbas and provide a more detailed explanation of the particular features of its mandate. The odd briefing is clearly not enough. The inhabitants of Donetsk, Luhansk, Horlivka and other towns have been living under shellfire for three years now. They are not always aware that the monitors have their limitations – they are far from being able to record every instance of shelling, cannot always establish from where the shots were fired and cannot travel everywhere, but the main thing is that the Mission cannot force the Ukrainian Government to stop the shelling.

The publication of a detailed, complete and honest report on the consequences of the bombardment of Donbas since 2014 would be an important step, which would increase confidence in the SMM. People must see that the destruction of their homes and the deaths of their loved ones are not escaping the SMM's attention.

Despite the Ukrainian Government's scorn for the Minsk agreements, they remain the only guideline for breaking the impasse. The way the situation is developing suggests that the Ukrainian Government will maintain tension in Donbas until it runs out of shells. And there are a lot of weapons in Ukraine.

Our Western colleagues who are supplying Ukraine with materiel and sending their military personnel, instructors and mercenaries there are making the prospect of a settlement less likely. It doesn't matter what explanations they give for these actions, they are simply fuelling the Ukrainian Government's bellicose sentiments.

As long as the Ukrainian Government can maintain military tension in Donbas, it will not switch to implementing the political aspects of the Package of Measures. And without this, without the enactment of the law on special status, without the agreement of modalities for local elections and their consolidation in Ukrainian legislation, without the holding and recognition of elections, without an amnesty and constitutional reform in Ukraine, a settlement of the crisis on the basis of the principles of the Package of Measures, including the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine, is impossible. The big question is whether the Ukrainian Government is interested in such a settlement.

Thank you for your attention.