

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY
MR. ANDREY KELIN, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1042nd MEETING OF
THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

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

Mr. Chairperson,

We deeply regret the deaths of the miners at the Zasyadko mine and express our condolences to the relatives of those killed. In accordance with the 1997 law on bilateral co-operation with the Government of Ukraine, the head of the Ministry for Civil Defence, Emergencies and Disaster Relief offered assistance in the rescue efforts.

The Minsk agreements of 12 February, approved by a United Nations Security Council resolution, pave the way for a sustainable peaceful settlement of the conflict in Ukraine. Today we can see significant progress in the implementation of the priority measures agreed upon in Minsk.

The ceasefire is being consolidated. The Joint Centre for Control and Co-ordination has noted a considerable reduction in the number of ceasefire violations. Practical co-operation has begun within the ceasefire monitoring system. In some cases the circumstances of these violations have been verified and clarified. We note the work of the Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) monitors, who continue to record in their reports instances involving the use of weapons. We call on them to more actively patrol the zone around the line of contact, which will not only enable violations to be recorded but will also help to strengthen the ceasefire regime.

Heavy weapons are being withdrawn to the prescribed distances. The Donbas insurgents have provided the SMM with information regarding the equipment locations prior to withdrawal, the withdrawal routes and the subsequent storage sites, as they said they would. The monitors are able to visit these sites on a daily basis.

Providing the monitors with the equipment withdrawal plans along with additional information not envisaged in the Minsk Package of Measures is an important factor in confidence-building. It is essential to ensure that the procedure for sending such information is the same for the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DPR and LPR) and Kyiv. We

note – and this can also be seen from the SMM reports – that the DPR and LPR are markedly more active and open in the withdrawal of their equipment than the Ukrainian security forces. On 1 March, the DPR announced that it had completed the withdrawal of its equipment ahead of schedule. A similar statement was made by the LPR on 2 March. In doing so, they met the two-week deadline given in the agreement.

Ukraine began a step-by-step withdrawal of its weapons only on 26 February. In this connection, the monitors have followed some of the weapons withdrawn. It is not yet clear when this withdrawal process will be completed. Unfortunately, we are witnessing some hesitation on the part of the Ukrainian Government and attempts to find pretexts to artificially drag out the schedule provided for by the Minsk agreements. I might recall that the start of the political process is linked to the completion of the withdrawal.

From time to time we hear claims, from both sides, that withdrawn weapons are subsequently returned to their positions, particularly in Mariupol. We urge the SMM monitors, without waiting for all the additional details they would like to receive, to promptly expand and step up their efforts to monitor the withdrawal of equipment.

I stress: today, at a time when there is no trust between the parties, it would be counter-productive for the SMM to push for impractical additional conditions for the monitoring and verification of the withdrawal of equipment, on which the parties to the conflict have themselves not agreed. The priority now should be to verify the absence or presence of the weapons to be withdrawn in the security zone and to document this. The main thing is that there should be no heavy weapons, which pose a major threat to the civilian population, left in this zone.

It is essential to pay equal attention to the monitoring of territories on both sides of the line of contact. There can be no selectivity here. Naturally, all of this should be done in close contact with the parties and with due regard for the security requirements.

We call on the SMM to continue the practice of including information on the results of the monitoring in its reports, obviously taking into account the fact that some information may be of a confidential nature.

The Minsk agreements should be implemented in full and as a package. We draw attention to the fact that as yet Kyiv has done nothing to implement the Minsk provisions on the restoration of socio-economic relations with Donbas or on social transfers and pension payments. We look forward to increased dialogue within the Contact Group and the establishment at the earliest opportunity of specialist working groups as provided for in the Minsk agreements.

A sustainable settlement of the crisis is possible only if the Ukrainians themselves reach an agreement. Kyiv needs to find a common language with all the political forces and regions of the country and put a stop to the resurgence of radicalism and nationalism. The dialogue within the Contact Group should impart fresh impetus to the work on a formula for a State structure in which all the inhabitants of Ukraine would live comfortably and safely and human rights would be respected in full.

We urge the Ukrainian leadership to distance itself from the “war party” and other extremists and set a course towards achieving peace and harmony in the multi-ethnic

Ukrainian society in a manner acceptable to all. Rejecting hate speech and incitement to ideological, national and religious hatred should be a key element in this process.

Monitoring the situation in south-eastern Ukraine should undoubtedly be a priority in the SMM's work. However, no one has relieved it of the other tasks in its mandate. Unfortunately, when reading the SMM reports, this is exactly the impression one has. This applies to monitoring the implementation by the Ukrainian authorities of their OSCE commitments, including respect for human rights, questions concerning the rule of law, and the situation regarding freedom of the media. The wave of political trials, the pressure put on opposition politicians to the point that they commit suicide, and the Ukrainian Security Service's harassment of opposition civil activists who speak out against the military draft all require careful attention. We believe that the OSCE monitors could take a closer interest in at least the most high-profile cases, keep statistics on detentions and sentencing for "political reasons" and attend trials.

Mr. Chairperson,

Attacks on media representatives because of their "separatist" views continue. The total ban on the work of Russian media in Ukraine is completely unacceptable. Since the start of the campaign against the media, around 50 Russian journalists have been deported from Ukraine on political charges. The blacklist drawn up by the Ukrainian Security Service makes it possible to refuse accreditation and use repressive measures against representatives of any Russian media. The description by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media of such measures as being merely "excessive" raises serious questions regarding the impartiality of her approach. For example, similar things in other countries have been given more objective assessments. We trust that the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, a position specifically established to protect journalists, will fulfil her commitments fully and in good faith. There is no reason why this important aspect should not also be reflected in the SMM reports. If the monitors have any doubts regarding the reliability of this information, they have every opportunity to look into this matter independently and objectively.

We also urge delegations not to close their eyes to the fact that extremists are fanning the flames of interreligious discord. Priests and followers of the canonical Orthodox Church are subjected to intimidation and harassment. Ten churches have been completely destroyed in south-eastern Ukraine alone, and a further 77 have suffered serious damage. There are regular reports of attacks on churches and priests in the west of the country. Three Orthodox priests have been killed.

At the same time, we also note some positive developments. The Ukrainian military prosecutor's office announced that some 75 cases have been opened against Aidar battalion fighters suspected of crimes. An impartial investigation could contribute to national reconciliation, and the SMM could provide this process with the necessary publicity.

We also hope that the decree signed by President Petro Poroshenko on 3 March on the establishment of a constitutional commission to introduce changes to the Ukrainian Constitution will lead to real results this time. In accordance with the Minsk agreements, decentralization taking into account the characteristics of certain areas of Donbas, to be agreed upon with the representatives of these regions, as well as the adoption of permanent legislation on their special status should be a key element of constitutional reform.

Mr. Chairperson,

The catastrophic humanitarian situation in eastern Ukraine requires urgent action. According to United Nations estimates, 5 million people are in need of assistance, and 1.4 million of them require medical care. The situation is exacerbated by the continuing economic blockade by Kyiv and the refusal to pay pensions and social benefits. The special entry/exit regime introduced by the Kyiv authorities in the conflict zone is hampering the work of human rights organizations there and the delivery of humanitarian aid to the suffering population. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 250,000 elderly people have been unable to reach the registration offices and have been deprived of their rightful social benefits. Requisitions, looting and extortion continue in areas bordering the line of separation.

In order to ensure the elementary rights of the inhabitants, the Ukrainian Government must immediately lift the *de facto* blockade it has imposed on this region and restore economic ties between Donbas and other parts of the country. The relevant provisions are set out in the Minsk agreements and they need to be implemented without delay. So far nothing is being done in this regard. We are firmly convinced that the human rights bodies and United Nations humanitarian agencies working in Ukraine, the OSCE Mission and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) will work towards solving these problems as quickly as possible.

We believe it important for the ICRC to be more actively involved in the provision of humanitarian assistance to the population of Donbas. The Minsk agreements (point 7) specifically state that humanitarian assistance should be provided on the basis of an international mechanism. I might add that it is surprising that the representatives of the European Union and the United States of America are once again not up to date with what is happening. The most recent convoy was inspected thoroughly by Ukrainian customs officers and border guards at the Donetsk checkpoint. This was mentioned in yesterday's spot report by the OSCE observers. Evidently, you did not read it. Perhaps the Contact Group should clearly and realistically define the format of this mechanism taking into account the specific situation in the regions.

Thank you for your attention.