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PC.DEL/247/20
5 March 2020

ENGLISH
Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1261st MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

5 March 2020

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

Mr. Chairperson,

The continuing domestic political turbulence in Ukraine means there is no progress in the settlement of the armed confrontation in the east of the country. Violations of the ceasefire regime continue at the line of contact. Once again, all the casualties and destruction of civilian objects over the past week occurred on the territory of certain areas of Donbas. In Donetsk, a man was injured by an explosive object he found in his yard. Residential buildings and a garage were damaged in Zolote-5/Mykhailivka. A functioning school building and private property [a brick shed] came under fire from a large-calibre machine gun in Oleksandrivka in the Donetsk region. From the nature of the damage to the aforementioned objects, the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) was able to establish the direction of fire, which indicated that the shots had been fired from Ukrainian armed forces' positions. Once again, we urge the Mission to catalogue the data on civilian casualties and the destruction of civilian infrastructure in Donbas.

Before the SMM had even had time to assess fully the devastating consequences of the diversionary operation conducted by the Ukrainian armed forces on 18 February near the disengagement area in Zolote, the Ukrainian Government decided to ratchet up the tension in this area again. On 29 February, the Mission saw 50 Ukrainian soldiers in full combat gear in residential areas in the settlements of Zolote-2/Karbonit and Zolote-4/Rodina. On the same day, some thirty cars carrying about a hundred armed Ukrainian security officers drove by. Under the pretext of a training exercise, they drove through the disengagement area in Zolote, where there should be no equipment or armed individuals present (report dated 2 March).

On 29 February and 1 March, the use of unmanned aerial vehicles in violation of the Minsk agreements was again recorded in areas controlled by the Ukrainian armed forces.

It is remarkable that despite the announcement of some two dozen truces in Donbas already, each time the Ukrainian armed forces fail to publish orders prohibiting their soldiers from opening fire. I would remind you that the ceasefire agreed upon by the Ukrainian Government and the authorities in Donbas in July 2019 was meant to be comprehensive and indefinite. The militia issued the relevant orders at the time, as it had done on all previous occasions. The Ukrainian Government has as yet done nothing of the sort. The outcome is continued military tension, and fresh casualties and destruction.

All this merely confirms the need for a qualitative enhancement of the monitoring by the SMM near the line of contact. Any military preparations by the Ukrainian armed forces should be closely monitored. The problem of the systematic failure to allow monitors access to areas controlled by the Ukrainian military that have been declared off-limits for SMM patrols under the pretext of a threat from mines also needs to be resolved.

The situation at the checkpoints on the line of contact remains depressing. The checkpoint regime still in place there is a consequence of the Ukrainian authorities' continued obstruction of the everyday life of the population of Donbas and the Ukrainian Government's failure to fulfil its socio-economic obligations under the Minsk agreements. As a result, humanitarian contacts between divided families have also been hampered. Reports about the death of Ukrainians queuing to cross the line of contact have become almost routine, but no less terrible for that. The latest incident was recorded at the Ukrainian checkpoint in Marinka, where an 80-year-old pensioner died on 24 February (report dated 27 February). This is already the fifth death from natural causes at checkpoints to be reported by the Mission since the start of the year.

The deployment of Ukrainian hardware near the checkpoint in Marinka raises questions. Last week, the SMM spotted an anti-tank missile system aimed at the militia and an armoured combat vehicle belonging to the Ukrainian armed forces near the checkpoint.

By maintaining military and humanitarian tensions at the line of contact in Donbas, the Ukrainian leadership is deliberately distracting public attention from the Government's inability to take concrete steps under the Minsk agreements. Almost three months after the Normandy format summit of 9 December 2019, there is still no progress on the "Paris package" of instructions to the Trilateral Contact Group. The Ukrainian Government continues to persist in evading direct and productive dialogue with the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk. As a result, the discussions on priority measures, including the agreement of new areas for the disengagement of forces and hardware, and the opening of additional checkpoints on the line of contact, have stalled. The personnel shake-up in Kyiv is clearly doing nothing to accelerate the implementation of the political provisions of the Minsk Package of Measures – on an amnesty, on enshrining the special status of Donbas on a permanent basis, and on reaching agreement with the authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk on the framework for holding local elections.

At the same time, the Ukrainian leadership is for some reason eager to go straight to the next Normandy format summit, despite not having yet implemented the decisions of the previous summit in Paris. It seems that they are interested in holding this new meeting for the sake of keeping the topic "afloat" on the international agenda, rather than making practical progress in the settlement. We call on France and Germany to use their leverage on the Ukrainian Government so that the "Paris package" can be implemented as soon as possible.

Unwilling to make efforts towards a settlement, the Ukrainian Government has instead set about tightening the screws within Ukraine. Clearly, it is becoming increasingly difficult for the Ukrainian authorities to explain to the country's citizens why their taxes are spent not on schools, hospitals or investment in the economy, but on warheads launched against peaceful towns in their own country. It appears that it will soon even become illegal to talk about this in the Ukrainian media. The draft law on the media under consideration in the Verkhovna Rada is obviously intended to restrict as much as possible the legal space for any discussions on the settlement of the internal Ukrainian crisis and the implementation of the Minsk agreements. Any criticism of the authorities can be classed as so-called anti-Ukrainian propaganda and banned from being published. This is a very convenient position for glossing over one's inaction. However, it comes at the price of a scandalous clampdown on freedom of speech. Under the slogan of fighting to ensure the "reliability" of information, they want to establish legislation instituting draconian

censorship in the country. A wide range of repressive instruments against dissident journalists is envisaged by the draft law, from the blocking of publications to imprisonment.

We note the legal analysis of the aforementioned draft law recently issued by the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. Detailed comparison of its provisions with international standards makes for a bleak picture. The proposed restrictive measures are considered excessive, and the attempts to justify them on national security grounds are not seen as providing sufficient justification for the imposition of such sweeping restrictions. We call on Mr. Harlem Désir to continue to keep a close eye on this matter and to prevail upon the Ukrainian Government to fulfil its OSCE commitments. The facts presented in the report should also be taken into account in the work of the SMM and the Office of the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine.

Mr. Chairperson,

Six years after the coup d'état in Kyiv in February 2014, we can emphatically state that every one of those more than 2,000 days has been accompanied by manifestations of violence, intolerance and hatred. Every one of those more than 300 weeks in Donbas has been marred by the suffering of the victims of the armed confrontation unleashed by the "Maidan" authorities. The line of contact established in the region has become a peculiar symbol of the absence of political will among those in power in Kyiv – that is, of the will to move closer to peace in practice and not only in words. We would remind you that the only framework for achieving this is the full implementation in good faith by the parties to the internal Ukrainian crisis – the Ukrainian Government and the authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk – of the commitments under the Minsk Package of Measures of 12 February 2015 on the basis of direct and respectful dialogue.

Thank you for your attention.