

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. DMITRY BALAKIN,
DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1177th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

1 March 2018

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

Mr. Chairperson,

Four years ago the domestic political crisis in Ukraine, inspired and fuelled from abroad, turned into an anti-constitutional coup, an armed riot of radical nationalists and a most brutal civil conflict that continues to this day. This is the price that the people of Ukraine are forced to pay for believing empty promises. The artificial choice between the so-called European path and the development of ties with Russia has torn the country apart, created a hotbed of instability on the borders with the European Union and Russia, and inflicted a powerful blow to the entire European security system.

Unfortunately, the situation is far from being stabilized. The law on the so-called reintegration of Donbas entered into force in Ukraine on 24 February. This is a dangerous step towards escalation of the conflict in Donbas, first and foremost because it contravenes the spirit and the letter of the Package of Measures – the only real basis for a peaceful settlement. The deliberate exclusion from the draft law of references to the Minsk agreements once again confirms that the Ukrainian Government does not recognize them as binding and has no intention of implementing them.

There is a clear discrepancy between the provisions of that law and the law on the special status of Donbas, whose agreement with representatives of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions and entry into force are provided for in Point 11 of the Package of Measures and in the Normandy format agreements.

There is a clear attempt by the authorities in Kyiv to indulge in wishful thinking. The unwillingness to reach agreements with representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk has forced the Ukrainian Government to present them as a so-called occupying administration instead. The false narrative about “aggression” is meant to justify war crimes by the army and so-called volunteers.

Without going into additional details, we note that this law in no way touches upon the main condition of Donbas's reintegration – a comprehensive political settlement as defined in Points 9 and 11 of the Package of Measures, and also the need for direct dialogue with Donetsk and Luhansk.

In this light, any claims to the effect that the law in question is in keeping with the Minsk agreements are unfounded.

The Ukrainian Minister of Defence, Stepan Poltorak, received instructions to prepare before 1 April proposals for changing the format of the military operation in Donbas. The attempt to legalize the use of the Ukrainian army against the civilian population to repel so-called aggression should not mislead people. Replacing the leading agency and rebranding the so-called anti-terrorist operation as something else does not change the essence of the conflict: this remains an attempt to violently suppress those who disagree with the anti-constitutional coup of February 2014 in Kyiv.

Perhaps the only thing that a redistribution of power among the security authorities will affect is how revenue from smuggling across the line of contact is divided up.

We caution the Ukrainian Government against any steps aimed at further undermining the work of the Trilateral Contact Group in Minsk – the only platform for direct dialogue with Donetsk and Luhansk.

We call for strict observance of the “spring” ceasefire agreed for 5 March. Ceasefire orders need to be published, and the parties need to refrain from provocative actions such as occupying positions in the “grey zone”. It is important to prevent an escalation, preparations for which we can see thanks to the reports by the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) among other things.

The Ukrainian armed forces have consolidated their position in the village of Novooleksandrivka in what is known as the “grey zone” and set up camp inside the disengagement area in Zolote. Military equipment is being massed at the line of contact. Over the past two weeks, the SMM has observed 30 pieces of weaponry belonging to the Ukrainian armed forces in violation of the package of Measures and 110 units of military equipment immediately behind the withdrawal lines. The Ukrainian armed forces are carrying out live-fire exercises at the line of contact in violation of the Trilateral Contact Group's decision of 3 March 2016. Over the past two weeks, almost 200 artillery guns and tanks have gone missing from storage sites belonging to the Ukrainian armed forces. The Ukrainian Government is blocking the disengagement of forces in Stanytsia Luhanska, although a ceasefire regime has held there since 26 December 2017.

On 14 February, the Ukrainian armed forces shelled two schools in Dokuchaievsk while classes were being held. It was a miracle that none of the children were injured. As a result of shelling, one civilian was injured in Spartak and houses were damaged in Holmivskiyi, Horlivka, Dovhe, Kashtanove, Kominternove and Molodizhne.

On 22 February, an ambulance with clearly discernible Red Cross symbols carrying a wounded member of the militia was hit near Dokuchaievsk by an anti-tank guided missile, despite the ceasefire agreed with the help of the SMM.

In the early hours of 24 February, security forces opened fire on a massive scale in the immediate vicinity of the monitors, which forced them to carry out an emergency evacuation of their patrol base in Popasna.

Under the pretext of mine hazards, access for the monitors to security force-controlled areas in Stanytsia Luhanska, Shchastia, Zolote and other places has been closed for a long time. On 21 February, an SMM unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) once again came under fire from the Ukrainian armed forces in Kostiantynivka. This is already the sixth incident involving security forces firing at the Mission's UAVs since the start of the year (12 January in Pavlopil, 2 February in Verkhnyotoretske, 4 February over a weapons storage site in the Donetsk region, 6 February in Mykolaivka, 10 February in Klishchiivka and 21 February in Kostiantynivka).

Mr. Chairperson,

The situation in Donbas starts to worsen as soon as tension in other parts of Ukraine rises. On Tuesday, there was another clash in Kyiv outside the Verkhovna Rada building. National Militia members and Donbas Battalion volunteers clashed with the police on 15 and 16 February in the Ukrainian capital and Odessa in an attempt to overturn the court ruling regarding the detention of the mayor of Odessa. On 23 February, Self-Defence, Sokil and AutoMaidan radicals armed with baseball bats and wearing hoods and bulletproof vests managed to get the authorities to turn control of the Lermontovskyi sanatorium in Odessa over to them.

Attacks by radicals on Russian institutions and monuments have become more frequent. On 17 February, nationalists attacked the Russian Centre of Science and Culture in Kyiv. Radicals led by the Verkhovna Rada deputy Andrey Lozov forced their way into the building, where there were around fifty children and as many adults. While the police looked on, radicals destroyed the exhibition and covered the walls with extremist graffiti. The next day, nationalists pelted the building with bricks and eggs before the eyes of SMM monitors. The Ukrainian police once again failed to intervene. On 26 February, Ukrainian nationalists threw incendiary devices at the Russian Consulate General in Odessa and poured red paint over its fence. On 14 February, radicals attempted to set fire to a Sberbank office in Lviv. On 18 February, windows were broken at a branch of the same bank in Kyiv. On 15 and 24 February, the memorial honouring the Soviet liberator soldier in Lviv was desecrated. The Ukrainian nationalist leader Nikolay Kokhanovsky publicly threatened to continue attacks on Russian facilities in Ukraine.

The religious factor is being heated up. Radicals attack members of the clergy and property of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. The SMM has already recorded countless attacks and attempts to seize churches, to say nothing of the murders of priests that occurred in 2014.

The radicals' aggression is not only targeted against Russian facilities. On 27 February, radicals set fire to the office of the Hungarian cultural community in Uzhgorod. This was preceded by an unsuccessful attack on the Hungarian cultural centre on 4 February.

All of the aforementioned cases are incidents recorded by the SMM, which attest to the need for an urgent reaction on the part of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. There needs to be a

thematic report by the SMM on manifestations of radical nationalism, extremism and xenophobia in Ukraine. A collective response from the international community is required to manifestations of radical Ukrainian nationalism.

The lawlessness of the radicals occurs with the connivance of the authorities in Kyiv, who themselves pursue a discriminatory policy towards the Russian-speaking community and national minorities. The law on education adopted by the Verkhovna Rada in September 2017 violates Article 10 of the Ukrainian Constitution and Point 11 of the Minsk Package of Measures, which provides for the adoption of permanent legislation on the special status of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions with account taken of their right to linguistic self-determination. The Ukrainian Government has restricted the non-Ukrainian-speaking population of the country in their right to receive an education in their native tongue and is deepening the divide in Ukrainian society.

Reports have emerged about the repeal of the law on the principles of language policy by the Ukrainian Constitutional Court under pressure from the radicals. According to various estimates, at least a third of Ukrainian society will suffer as a result of this.

Under the pretext of protection against aggression, the right to freedom of speech and association is being infringed and dissidents are being persecuted. Even Amnesty International pointed to the unprecedented nature of human rights violations in Ukraine in its report on the state of human rights in various countries of the world in 2017. The report refers to the persecution of journalists and critics of Ukraine's current political course. It notes the lack of results in the investigation into the murders of Oles Buzina and Pavel Sheremet. There are reports of regular persecution of civil rights activists investigating corruption. The existence of secret prisons operated by the Security Service of Ukraine is confirmed. It notes the widespread use of torture and ill-treatment by Ukrainian law enforcement officers. Countless cases of sexual violence by the Ukrainian armed forces and Ukrainian armed formations have been documented. It notes the indifference of the Ukrainian justice system to victims of violence, and the absence of proper support for the victims.

In conclusion, we recall the obvious. The Minsk agreements and the procedure provided for by them for a comprehensive political settlement through direct dialogue between the parties is the only real way of achieving peace. Ukrainian politicians' claims that the "Donbas problem" can be resolved by military means in two weeks are a recipe for disaster.

Thank you for your attention.