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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1217th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

14 February 2019

**In connection with the report by the Chief Observer of the OSCE Observer
Mission at the Russian multilateral vehicle checkpoints of Gukovo and
Donetsk, Mr. György Varga**

Mr. Chairperson,

We are pleased to once again see in this room György Varga, distinguished Chief Observer of the OSCE Observer Mission at the Russian multilateral vehicle checkpoints of Gukovo and Donetsk, which were established at the invitation of the Russian Federation as a goodwill gesture in the wake of the Berlin Declaration of 2 July 2014 of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Germany, France and Ukraine. It has been frequently observed in your regular reports that the situation at the Russian-Ukrainian border is calm, with no movement of troops or military equipment.

When deciding whether to extend the Mission's mandate, we assess not only the results of its work, but also the general state of affairs related to the situation on the other side of the border, as well as the discussion in the OSCE on this topic. We are perplexed at the appeals made by individual participating States to expand the powers of the Observer Mission and to give undue importance to the border issue in the framework of the implementation of the Minsk agreements. In actual fact, we are being offered a selective and skewed reading of the Minsk Package of Measures and Point 4 of the Minsk Protocol of 5 September 2014. This is an obvious politicization of Russia's goodwill gesture. As you know, if an outstretched hand is pushed away, it will have to be put back in the pocket. Such politicized appeals clearly do not benefit the real work of the OSCE in the field and send the wrong signals to the Ukrainian Government, which, as you know, openly sabotages the fulfilment of the commitments made in Minsk. We will have to take this into account when considering the issue of extending the mandate of the Observer Mission for the future.

Let me remind you that the Package of Measures is a detailed plan for the reintegration into Ukraine of the Donbas region, which opposed the coup d'état on the Maidan. This reintegration should be carried out on the basis of a special status, which among other things includes the promotion of cross-border co-operation with the Russian regions. As for the restoration of the Ukrainian Government's control over the border, that will happen

only after a comprehensive political settlement and the entry into force of the new constitution of Ukraine, which will provide for decentralization as a key element. That is what is set out in the Package of Measures, which was signed by the President of Ukraine and the leaders of Donbas and approved by the United Nations Security Council.

I should also like to remind you of a lesser known fact. Russia initially proposed to deploy an observer mission to three checkpoints (Novoshakhtinsk, in addition to Gukovo and Donetsk). But it was Ukraine's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Pavlo Klimkin, who rejected that option. And now you propose to extend the mandate. Where is the logic in that?

Russia has undertaken no obligations to deploy OSCE observers along the border with Ukraine. I emphasize that the obligations in Minsk refer not to Moscow, but to the parties to the conflict – Kyiv, Donetsk and Luhansk. The time has come to stop reinterpreting the meaning of the Minsk agreements and to focus on their implementation. Unfortunately, we have so far only witnessed attempts by the Ukrainian Government to solve the problem by force through shelling, military build-up, and tightening of the economic and transport blockade of the region. We once again urge a return to the process of settling the conflict in Donbas by peaceful political means.

The reports of the Observer Mission and the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) continue to demonstrate that the population of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions is suffering the direst consequences of the economic blockade imposed on them by the Ukrainian Government, the imposition of which is a violation of the Minsk Package of Measures. After being virtually abandoned by their country, residents of Donbas are forced to travel to Russia for the purchase of vital goods. This is reflected in the sustained traffic flow across the border recorded by observers and the high number of crossings made by entire families.

To help people in a hopeless situation, Russia regularly sends convoys to Donbas with the most necessary humanitarian supplies – food, medicines and children's products. We are obliged to notify the OSCE Secretariat about each convoy, and it forwards this information to the Mission at the border and to the SMM. Again, I emphasize that, as a goodwill gesture on the part of Russia, Ukrainian customs officers and border guards are stationed at the Donetsk checkpoint. They participate in inspections of humanitarian convoys, as verified by OSCE observers.

Mr. Varga,

It is important that you have established constructive co-operation with the Representative Office of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rostov-on-Don and with local authorities. Collaboration with government agencies in the host country is a major prerequisite for the success of any field presence. At the checkpoints, observers have all the conditions necessary for the effective fulfilment of their mandate. The observers themselves comply with the operating restrictions in force on the territory of the checkpoints, which allow Russian border guards and customs officers to carry out their duties. We recall that the restrictions on the work and presence of OSCE observers at checkpoints are absolutely objective and are related to the sensitive nature of these sites. I believe that, for example, at the border of the United States of America with Mexico, it would be even more difficult to obtain binoculars or move freely.

It is good that more and more Mission personnel are being accredited at their countries' embassies in Russia. This year, two observers from Georgia were accredited at the Swiss embassy in Moscow. Considering the OSCE's lack of international legal personality and legal capacity, this is the only way to grant the Mission's staff immunities and privileges. We encourage other participating States to also take this path.

Thank you for your attention.