

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1137th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

16 March 2017

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

Mr. Chairperson,

The situation in the conflict zone in Ukraine remains tense. Over 1,000 violations of the ceasefire regime are reported on a daily basis. During the first two months of this year, according to the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) alone, 76 civilians were injured and 16 killed. Of these victims, 66 per cent were in militia-controlled territory. Heavy weapons and mortars are being used, and tanks fire over open sights at houses and infrastructure. The Donetsk filtration plant is once again without power. Indiscriminate shelling of militia-controlled towns and villages continues.

Over the past week alone, the Mission confirmed that civilians had been injured in Kominternove and Frunze, houses had been damaged and destroyed in Donetsk, Horlivka, Dokuchaievsk, Donetskyi, Kalynove, Luhansk, Stakhanov, Yasynuvata and Yasne, and there had been artillery strikes against Pervomaik. The Ukrainian Government continues to increase its volume of military equipment at the line of contact and immediately behind the withdrawal lines. Security forces have been spotted once again inside the disengagement area at Zolote. On 13 March, the monitors saw a high mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicle in Ukrainian armed forces-controlled Katerynivka. In the vehicle were five men wearing Ukrainian uniforms and armed with a rocket-propelled grenade launcher and automatic rifles.

Given the conduct of the Ukrainian armed forces, there is no point in trying to demonize the militia. We have taken note of the incident that occurred in Kominternove. On 10 March, an SMM patrol that had arrived to conduct monitoring during repair work came under fire from Ukrainian armed forces. Two 82 mm mortar shells exploded 30 metres away from the monitors, and they felt the shock waves. It was a miracle that none of the monitors, militia or civilians in the vicinity were injured. This is not an isolated incident – the Ukrainian armed forces have already disrupted the repair work at the Donetsk filtration plant on several occasions with their shelling.

The security forces are systematically restricting the monitors' freedom of movement. Under the pretext of a "mine threat", the SMM has had its access blocked to areas controlled by the Ukrainian armed forces in Stanytsia Luhanska, Shchastia, Bohdanivka, Artema, Nyzhnoteple, Katerynivka, Popasna and Zolote. The Ukrainian Government has not taken any measures to punish those guilty of hindering the SMM's work.

We urge the SMM to work more intensively with the local media and to improve contacts with the population and the authorities on both sides of the line of contact. This will help to avoid misunderstandings and inaccurate interpretations of the Mission's mandate.

Patrolling the area along the line of contact and constant monitoring at checkpoints and areas for the disengagement of forces and hardware remain the priority for the SMM.

The monitors have so far been unable to carry out their main tasks – to record the establishment of a lasting ceasefire and the withdrawal of weapons, but their work does have a restraining effect. The frequency of the patrols near the line of contact needs to be increased and greater use needs to be made of the increasing daylight hours for longer periods in the field. More time should be spent travelling around the front-line residential areas of Donetsk.

The fact that the positions of the opposing parties are so close together is one of the reasons for the skirmishes. The "creeping offensive" of the Ukrainian armed forces will not lead to anything other than an escalation of the situation. However, the main reason is the absence of political will on the part of the Ukrainian Government, which does not want to switch from the military phase of the conflict to a political one. Unfortunately, the chances of normalizing the situation are not high as long as internal political instability persists in Ukraine, and the authorities need to fuel the idea of a military threat from Donbas.

On top of this, there is the tightening of the Ukrainian Government's language policy, which infringes on the right of national minorities to access information in their native language. First and foremost, this concerns the Russian language, which a significant and possibly overwhelming majority of Ukrainians use for everyday communication. Works and forms of cultural expression from not only the Soviet but also the Russian period are subjected to persecution. Almost 600 Russian films have been banned in Ukraine. The number of Russian cultural figures who are prohibited from entering Ukraine has risen to 140. A total of 77 Russian channels are prohibited from broadcasting. Who was threatened by the "Hunter and Fisher" television channel? On 3 March 2017, the National Council of Television and Radio Broadcasting of Ukraine refused to extend the broadcasting licence for Radio Vesti in Kyiv because it does not have enough programmes in the Ukrainian language. Calls for the introduction of bilingualism are tantamount to a crime against the constitutional order of the country and may result in criminal prosecution.

Incidentally, Ukraine is confidently fighting to become the champion of anti-Russian paranoia.

This has already had disastrous consequences for Ukrainian statehood and the unity of the country. However, it seems that the Ukrainian Government does not intend to do anything to stop this. No good will come of this kind of "cultural revolution" and the enthusiasm for "decommunization" and "de-Russification".

Representatives of the so-called National Corpus party, established by the notorious neo-Nazi group Azov, have complied with the call by the Ukrainian Minister of Internal Affairs, Arsen Avakov, to stop the activities of Russian banks in Ukraine. Branches of banks with Russian capital have been bricked up with concrete blocks. Cash machines have been filled with sealing foam. This latest manifestation of lawlessness in Ukraine needs to be condemned in no uncertain terms. It is an original way of increasing Ukraine's investment prospects.

We remind you that the decision to recognize documents issued to citizens of Ukraine in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions can be changed following the complete implementation of the Minsk agreements by the Ukrainian Government – the end of the punitive operation and the withdrawal of weapons, the conduct of constitutional reform and the consolidation of the special status of Donbas, the recognition of local elections and the implementation of point 8 of the Package of Measures concerning the full resumption of socio-economic ties.

Against the background of the Ukrainian Government's actions, the steps taken by the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk appear understandable. How much of the taxes from enterprises in Donbas was used to finance the punitive operation? Probably considerably more than the humanitarian aid provided by the Akhmetov Foundation. Some of our colleagues are quick to condemn any actions and statements by Donetsk and Luhansk, but close their eyes to the reasons. The indulgent attitude towards the radicals that have launched the blockade and towards the inhumane policy of the Ukrainian Government has created the current situation and will contribute to its continued deterioration.

In our view, the decision of the National Security Council of 15 March on the complete suspension of all transport links to Donbas will result in serious negative consequences. It lacks common sense and, what is more, openly contravenes the Package of Measures. The dispersal of a handful of radicals who were blocking the railway from Donbas in Kryvyi Torets did not require much effort on the part of the authorities. As soon as the political will was there, the decision was taken. All this could have been done a month ago and without putting the enterprises in Donbas in jeopardy.

It is to be hoped that the Ukrainian Government will also have the political will to implement the Minsk agreements, which remain the only framework for a settlement. Meanwhile, however, the Ukrainian Government is doing all it can to sabotage the possibility of implementing the political aspects of the Package of Measures, as can be seen from its refusal once again at the Trilateral Contact Group meeting to consolidate the Steinmeier formula.

Thank you for your attention.