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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1268th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL
VIA VIDEO TELECONFERENCE**

21 May 2020

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

Mr. Chairperson,

Exactly a year has passed since Volodymyr Zelenskyi assumed office as President of Ukraine. The potential for progress in the settlement process that began to emerge in 2019, which could have marked out a path for steady movement along the road to peace, has still not been realized. Much of the stimulus that the “Normandy format” sought to give the settlement process, including the majority of the instructions issued following the Normandy Quartet summit held on 9 December 2019 in Paris, has not been developed either. The negotiation process between the representatives of the Ukrainian Government and the representatives of the authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk is gradually coming to a standstill because of the Ukrainian Government’s destructive policy aimed at scrapping the Minsk agreements and at revising the commitments arising from those agreements.

Over the past year, there has been no let-up in the Ukrainian Government’s inhumane military operation against the civilians of Donbas. These people continue to fight for their right to life amidst the daily shelling and the socio-economic and transport blockade imposed by the Ukrainian authorities. The number of shelling casualties confirmed by the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) during the first half of May was close to a two-year high. All of these casualties, including five children, were recorded in the territory of certain areas of Donbas. In total, the SMM has received more than 20 reports of casualties since the beginning of May. This violence is often cynically justified by allegations that the militia is deploying military equipment near residential buildings. These allegations appear to be unfounded.

One need only take a look at the circumstances surrounding the recent incident in the settlement of Sakhanka in the south of certain areas of the Donetsk region, which resulted in injuries to two children. On 7 May, a group of civilians were busy tending a monument to Red Army soldiers killed fighting Nazism during the years of the Great Patriotic War. Repairs were also being carried out not far from the memorial at the local House of Culture as part of the preparations for events to mark Victory Day. No military hardware, militia positions or militia members themselves were anywhere near this place. However, live shells were fired from the direction of Ukrainian armed forces’ positions at unarmed civilians. The targeted fire was planned and deliberate. People, including children, suffered numerous serious injuries. These injuries, and

not just the physical ones, will take a long time to heal. Anyway, it appears that not only neo-Nazis but also the Ukrainian armed forces are attacking monuments to those who fought against fascism and those who look after these memorials.

All this is a result of the Ukrainian Government's unwillingness to put a stop to the violence. Its representatives at the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) are stubbornly refusing to confirm in writing commitments with the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk concerning adherence to the "silence regime" and agreement on measures in support of a ceasefire. These measures must include, among other things, the promulgation of orders for a ceasefire and the application of disciplinary measures against those who violate these orders, and the establishment of direct telephone contact between the opposing sides with a view to avoiding incidents. The representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk in the negotiation process have long since expressed their willingness to do so, but the Ukrainian Government lacks the political will to follow suit.

There has been no progress on the political track of the settlement either – not a single one of the Ukrainian Government's political commitments under the Minsk Package of Measures has been fulfilled properly so far. What is more, the Ukrainian authorities are demanding a change in the TCG's composition and the exclusion of the current representatives of Donbas from the TCG, renouncing the direct dialogue with them stipulated by the Minsk agreements.

To all appearances, the stalling of the negotiations in Minsk is due to the fact that the leadership of Ukraine is not ruling out the option of resolving the conflict by force. The actions of the Ukrainian military also attest to this. As we can see from the Mission's reports, the Ukrainian Government continues to use railway hubs for the further militarization of the region. SMM patrols have recorded the delivery of heavy artillery and surface-to-air missile systems. Here is just one recent example: on 16 May, the SMM spotted six Buk surface-to-air missile systems at Kostiantynivka station in the Donetsk region. This begs the question: against what targets in Donbas are the Ukrainian armed forces planning to use the destructive force of these systems, which are designed for strikes against aerial targets? We believe the SMM needs to step up its monitoring at railway hubs near the line of contact in Donbas, especially those hubs that have been mentioned repeatedly in the Mission's reports in connection with the discovery of dozens of tanks and large-calibre artillery guns belonging to the Ukrainian armed forces – Kostiantynivka, Khlivodarivka, Bakhmut, Druzhkivka, Rubizhne and others.

Against this background, it is not surprising that spikes in military activity have been observed and tension overall is growing. On 16 May, on the outskirts of the settlement of Berezivske (Luhansk region), shelling by the Ukrainian armed forces, which resulted in damage to a power line, almost led to a humanitarian disaster. Serious problems arose with the electricity and water supply to many homes and with a number of critical infrastructure facilities and industrial sites. Despite the SMM's efforts to organize a "window of silence" to enable repairs to be carried out to the damaged power line, the Ukrainian military failed to provide reliable guarantees for a ceasefire. First, they provided these guarantees, then soon after they suddenly withdrew them, thereby endangering the safety of the Mission's monitors who were in the vicinity.

We are seriously concerned about other incidents in which the monitors' safety has been threatened. The most recent example was the shelling on 18 May in Yasynuvata near Donetsk, when a shell exploded 500 metres away from a Mission patrol. Even at that distance the SMM staff felt the force of the blast. This could be an indication that large-calibre heavy weapons are being used in areas near the patrol's location, which clearly points to the involvement of the Ukrainian armed forces in that incident. Incidentally, this is not the first incident in Yasynuvata in recent times when damage from shelling has been recorded in close proximity to SMM monitors. On 13 April, monitors also came under fire outside the railway station – the

direction of fire established by the Mission suggested that the Ukrainian armed forces were responsible. The recent incidents in Olenivka, Molodizhne and Berezivske are just as worrying.

Speaking of which, during the online meeting of the Permanent Council last week, the distinguished representatives of Canada and the United States of America tried to accuse the Donbas militia of aggressive conduct towards OSCE monitors. They alleged that on 8 May SMM staff who had launched an unmanned aerial vehicle near Horlivka were captured, forced “to lie face down in the dirt with their hands behind their backs” and had had a gun pointed at them. The SMM Chief Monitor, Yaşar Halit Çevik, personally refuted all these bogus narratives at a briefing on 15 May. He explained that his staff generally felt quite comfortable in Donbas – the local population showed no aggression towards them and the conduct of the militia near Horlivka on 8 May could not be described as threatening. In reality, the situation there was due to some kind of misunderstanding between the militia and the monitors, which resulted in the patrol being delayed by about three hours. Having heard these facts, our North American colleagues set about accusing everyone but themselves of conducting “disinformation campaigns”. We urge them to refrain from using rumours and other information that has not been substantiated by facts, which quickly turn into propagandistic fake news. It is necessary to focus on constructive work to facilitate a settlement of the internal Ukrainian conflict in Donbas.

Mr. Chairperson,

During the discussions in the Permanent Council, we constantly hear from our colleagues on the other side of the Atlantic words in support of Ukraine’s sovereignty and independence. It is easy to understand exactly how they imagine such independence, after a member of the Ukrainian Parliament made public the day before yesterday snippets of conversations by Petro Poroshenko when he was President of Ukraine with his mentors in the United States, in particular with former US Vice President Joe Biden. These recordings are replete with additional illustrations of direct US interference in the internal affairs of Ukraine, hands-on control of the country’s domestic political processes and of the work of key government bodies, including the law enforcement system, and the issuing of direct instructions to the country’s top leadership regarding staff appointments. They even contain confirmations of reports to the US Government on the fulfilment of personal obligations by the Ukrainian leadership kept secret from the public. After all this, a perfectly legitimate question emerges: how independent is the Ukrainian Government’s policy on resolving the conflict in the east of the country?

And today, the position taken by a number of countries of inciting the Ukrainian armed forces to engage in aggressive operations against the civilian population of Donbas remains baffling. The United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and a number of Member States of the European Union continue to train the Ukrainian military and supply them with weapons and ammunition. Equally alarming is the fact that the ideas of radical nationalism and neo-Nazism are being encouraged at the State level in Ukraine, which is having a negative effect on the overall security situation in the country.

We are obliged to point out again that the continuing crisis in Ukraine is the result of the February 2014 coup d’état, which was inspired, directed, funded and organized from abroad and has led to the armed confrontation in Donbas and the suffering of millions of civilians in Ukraine on a massive scale. It is important that the Ukrainian people be able to take charge of their future for themselves without any external management being imposed on them by the United States.

The full implementation of the Minsk Package of Measures of 12 February 2015, which was endorsed by the United Nations Security Council, remains the only internationally recognized framework for the settlement of the internal Ukrainian crisis. We call on the OSCE to facilitate this process as much as

possible and to exert pressure on the Ukrainian Government to implement as soon as possible the Minsk road map for establishing peace in Ukraine.

Thank you for your attention.