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**STATEMENT BY MR. DMITRY BALAKIN,
DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN
FEDERATION, AT THE 1218th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

28 February 2019

On the fifth anniversary of the reunification of Crimea with Russia

Mr. Chairperson,

In a few days' time we shall be celebrating the fifth anniversary of the reunification of the Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol with Russia. All kinds of fabrications and undisguised slanders continue to be spread in connection with this truly historic event.

It is, therefore, important to recall once again how everything actually happened.

For the inhabitants of Crimea, the event in question was essentially the completion of a long journey home. The Crimeans were finally able to decide their fate themselves. The historic reunification of Crimea with Russia took place in accordance with the will of its population as clearly manifested in the referendum of 16 March 2014. Until then, the Crimean peninsula had been administered without consulting the opinion of its inhabitants.

After the end of the Great Patriotic War, the Crimean autonomous republic, while still remaining part of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, was transformed into the Crimean Oblast, which in 1954, without any referendum whatsoever beforehand and in violation of the legislation that was then in force in the USSR, was subordinated to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic by administrative decree. In 1991, the Crimeans tried to take their fate into their own hands by holding a referendum, in which a majority of 93 per cent voted in favour of restoring Crimea's autonomous status as a constituent republic of the USSR. The complicated political situation at the time, however, led to Crimea being left as part of Ukraine. All the same, it was precisely during that period that the seeds of the future "Crimean spring" were planted. Finally, in 2014, 97 per cent of Crimeans, freely exercising their democratic right of expression, voted for reunification with Russia. They thereby showed the whole world what the difference is between true and sham democracy.

On 18 March 2014, the treaty of accession of Crimea and Sevastopol to the Russian Federation was signed. The Crimean people thus fulfilled their legitimate right to self-determination. It has been exercised in full accordance with the norms of international law, namely with the Charter of the United Nations and other international documents,

including the Helsinki Final Act of the CSCE. Since then the question of Crimea's territorial affiliation has been closed.

I should like to recall the conditions in which the inhabitants of the Crimean peninsula had to decide their fate in 2014. In the spring of that year, the choice that lay before the Crimeans really was one between life and death. As a result of a coup d'état of foreign inspiration, radical nationalist forces came to power in Kyiv, thereby stifling the Ukrainian population's aspirations for a better future. Among their first actions, the new authorities began thrusting their ideology on everyone else and enforcing the Ukrainization of all walks of life. This included pandering to manifestations of neo-Nazism and suppressing dissent by any means, even through the use of force. From the very beginning, the Crimeans did not conceal their rejection of those ideas. They did not want to live in the same country as aggressive nationalists who are, in reality, neo-Nazis. Over 20,000 people took part in a rally in Sevastopol on 23 February to protest against the policies of the new authorities, whose anti-constitutional rule had begun with the repeal of the law on regional languages in Ukraine. The demonstrators also proclaimed Aleksei Chaly as the "people's mayor" of the city. Incidentally, the authorities in Kyiv did not call into question the right of Sevastopol's citizens to choose a "people's mayor". The scale of this rally was truly impressive.

Further confirmation of the true nature of the new "reality on the ground" in Ukraine came on 20 February 2014, when not far from the city of Korsun-Shevchenkivsky a convoy of buses carrying Crimeans on their way back from Kyiv was attacked by radical Ukrainian nationalists. Seven people were brutally murdered. A further 30 people went missing. The new masters of Kyiv did not hesitate to threaten dissenters with physical reprisals. A statement by Dmytro Yarosh, one of the "Maidan" leaders, to the effect that "the Russians must be expelled from Crimea, since they will never consent to singing the praises of Bandera" made it clear to the Crimeans what kind of fate awaited them in the "new" Ukraine.

On 27 February, a so-called friendship train bound for Crimea departed from Kyiv. It was organized by Igor Mosiychuk, one of the leaders of Right Sector (an organization that is banned in Russia), who declared that "the Crimean separatists will pay for everything ...". In other words, the nationalists were on their way to kill people. They took with them all the equipment that they had seized during a raid on military facilities in the Lviv region, ranging from truncheons, body armour and Molotov cocktails to firearms. Right Sector threatened, *inter alia*, to blow up the infrastructure of the Simferopol reservoir and to poison the water supply. Subsequently, the nationalists mounted a blockade of the peninsula, cutting off its water, food and energy supply, as well as transport routes.

Memories were still fresh of how groups of Bandera supporters had descended on Crimea in the 1990s, and no one there wanted a repeat of those events. Consequently, some 1,500 people gathered at the Simferopol railway station to meet the train, at which the nationalists simply took fright. After that, the Crimeans understood that they were the masters of their own fate, and an overwhelming majority voted for a return to the Motherland. Anyone who talks about "annexation" and the need to "shove" Crimea back into Ukraine is being profoundly disrespectful of the Crimean people, for it is in the latter that sovereignty over this territory is in fact vested.

Now we have a situation in which people who did not want to become victims of the neo-Nazis are being punished for their political free choice. While paying lip service to the principles of democracy, the Western countries are not hesitating to impose punitive

measures on people who merely spoke out about their future. The inhabitants of Crimea are being denied visas, and international companies seeking to do business on the peninsula are faced with a growing number of restrictions.

Against this backdrop, there are many who simply refuse point-blank to acknowledge the specific steps taken by the Russian authorities to promote Crimea's socio-economic development and preserve its cultural diversity. In this respect, the fate of the Crimean Tatars is a case in point. The West was not overly concerned by their lack of rights as long as Crimea formed part of Ukraine, which paid no heed to the recommendations made by international human rights bodies. And so it is to modern Russia that the task has fallen of putting right this situation after more than two decades during which the Crimean Tatars saw their rights trampled underfoot and suffered discrimination, i.e., during the period that this region formed part of Ukraine.

By expressing their will in 2014 the Crimean people were able to avoid the horrors of civil war – those horrors that the authorities in Kyiv have been inflicting on Donbas for almost five years now. The reports of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine testify to the horrendous situation in that region – a state of affairs for which the Ukrainian Government is to blame. One has the impression that the Ukrainian Government is bent on regaining territories but not the people living in them, as Dmytro Yarosh actually said about Crimea at one point. By the way, Refat Chubarov, the leader of the so-called Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People (an organization that is banned in Russia), expressed himself in a similar vein a few days ago.

That the inhabitants of Crimea made the right choice at the time has therefore been borne out by life itself. At present, we may confidently assert that Crimea's integration into the common political, legal and socio-economic space of Russia has been completed. Anyone doubting this is welcome to visit for themselves the Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol, where they will be convinced otherwise. Of course, much still remains to be done to promote the development of Sevastopol and of Crimea as a whole. Our work carries on. We will give you a detailed account of this in due course.

Thank you for your attention.