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**STATEMENT BY MR. ANDREY KELIN,
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AT THE 992nd MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

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Regarding the situation in Ukraine

Mr. Chairperson,

As it turns out, under the item on today's agenda regarding the situation in Ukraine, we have for some reason mainly been discussing the actions of the Russian Federation and have heard a great deal of histrionic rhetoric that would be better suited for televised debates than for discussions among professionals here in the Permanent Council. For the most part this rhetoric is based on information received from the media which is not objective. We are in agreement with the Permanent Representative of Ukraine that the discussion of unverified facts should be avoided.

Let me clarify matters. Ukrainian military personnel are currently withdrawing peacefully from Crimea. They have three choices: to continue serving in Ukraine, to join the armed forces of Crimea or to remain in Crimea as permanent residents. It is true that four officers were detained for a period of time, but they were released yesterday.

As for reports regarding a concentration of Russian troops on the eastern border of Ukraine, six inspections were conducted in March alone, three inspections under the Vienna Document on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures and three under the Treaty on Open Skies. Specifically, an Open Skies inspection by Germany and the United States of America from 17 to 23 March, an Open Skies inspection by Ukraine from 18 to 20 March, and an extraordinary observation flight as part of a Ukrainian Open Skies inspection from 20 to 23 March. As far as we understand, no concentration of troops was detected. Let us keep to the facts.

Now for the refugees from Kyiv, about which the Permanent Representative of Ukraine has spoken. There are indeed some calculations by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees with some emergency in mind. They see this as a potential threat, but so far no one has registered any refugee flows.

All of this is evidence of a persistent unwillingness to accept the politico-legal realities that have emerged since 21 March. There is a reluctance to admit that the primary cause of the crisis, which has led among other things to the separation of Crimea from

Ukraine, lies not with Russia but in the irresponsible actions of those who prepared, facilitated and organized a violent seizure of power in Kyiv. The conscious choice of the people of Crimea, the overwhelming majority of whom voted in favour of unification with Russia, must be accepted and respected.

The claims that this choice was exercised “at gunpoint” are unfounded. This is also refuted by international observers. At least 135 representatives of 23 countries, including OSCE participating States, responded to the invitation from the Crimean authorities. Among them were parliamentarians from Western and Eastern Europe and members of the European Parliament.

The statement by the United States arguing that “only one State believes that Crimea is not part of Ukraine” is even more puzzling. We have of late increasingly witnessed its desire to speak on behalf of “all the remaining OSCE participating States”. We do not believe that anyone has authorized it to do this.

The main thing is that the Crimean people themselves are in agreement with the change in the status of Crimea. It is not only Russia that respects and understands their choice. The term “occupation” is not applicable to the situation with Crimea and Sevastopol.

Mr. Chairperson,

I should like to return to the original subject under this agenda item – the situation in Ukraine.

The situation in Ukraine continues to be cause for serious concern. The danger posed by violent acts on the part of ultranationalists and other armed formations of uncertain origin against the peaceful protest movement in the south-eastern regions of the country shows no sign of decreasing. The arbitrary rule and lawlessness that continue to gather momentum in Ukraine are unacceptable.

I wish to stress – and the President of the Russian Federation, Mr. Vladimir Putin, has stated this directly to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany and the President of the United States of America – that Russia does not need an escalation of the situation in Ukraine. We want peace and harmony to prevail in Ukraine, and we are ready to work together with other countries to do everything possible to facilitate and support this. However, only Ukraine’s own people can put their house in order.

As it is, there is a clear weakening in the institutional capabilities of the Ukrainian State, which means Ukrainian society is threatened by rampant thuggery and ultranationalist lawlessness. The recent response by the Pravy Sektor (Right Sector) to the attempts by the Ukrainian law enforcement forces to begin to restore order is a clear sign that the situation in this area may deteriorate even further.

One of the key tasks today is to ensure the handover of all illegal weapons and the disarmament of the so-called self-defence forces. Attention has been drawn to the fact that some steps are being taken in this regard. We shall monitor how effective they are. It is clear that giving the “Maidan militants” legal status will not solve the problem and may in fact exacerbate it.

Disarmament of this kind would provide an opportunity to embark on real work to overcome the deep divide within society and carry out constitutional reform that would take into account the interests of all the regions of Ukraine.

We welcome the start of the work of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. Russian experts are willing to play an active part in its work. Talks are currently under way in Moscow with Ambassador Tim Guldemann, Personal Envoy of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Ukraine.

The work of the OSCE mission in Ukraine will be a real test of the OSCE's ability to act in an objective and impartial manner. If it manages to deal with this challenge, it will be able to make a contribution towards overcoming the crisis within Ukraine, eradicating thuggery and ultra-radical tendencies, achieving national harmony and observing the social, political, linguistic, educational, cultural and religious rights of all the inhabitants of Ukraine.

We expect that while monitoring the situation in Ukraine due attention will be given to identifying cases that are not receiving adequate coverage as a result of the specific situation regarding freedom of the media in Ukraine. It is alarming that such cases are not met with an appropriate response on the part of the Ukrainian law enforcement authorities, in whatever state they may be.

Perhaps the observers will be able to refute the reports about the involvement of private military companies from abroad in the suppression of protests in certain regions of Ukraine, or, for example, about reprisals against former military personnel and police officers in the western provinces of the country. Perhaps, at last, it will be possible to shed some light on the "issue of snipers" who were firing shots on the Maidan.

We note with regret that there are more and more frequent threats to priests. This time, radicals demanded that the representative of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (Cherkassy diocese), hegumen Alexander Shirokov, stop "any hostile pro-Moscow campaigning" under the threat of the use of physical force. This is no one-off. Such acts become possible in an atmosphere of impunity and permissiveness on the part of the self-proclaimed authorities in Kyiv.

We are also awaiting information from the other OSCE presences in Ukraine – experts sent by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the High Commissioner on National Minorities to assess the human rights situation, and the project to assist national dialogue in Ukraine, which has been deployed under the auspices of the Office of the Project Co-ordinator in Kyiv. Also of great interest is information as to how the observation mission to monitor the so-called presidential elections on 25 May intends to carry out its work under the current circumstances in Ukraine.

The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media also has much work to do, in particular as regards the ruling by a Kyiv court to prohibit broadcasting on Ukrainian territory by four Russian television channels – RTR, Russia 24, NTV and Channel One. Ms. Dunja Mijatović has already called attention to the dangerous trends with respect to freedom of the media in Ukraine. Evidently her views have been completely ignored. The Crimean Tartar channel continues to operate on the peninsula.

In the meantime, however, the Ukrainian population have to rely on the information they receive from the media, social networks, friends and relatives.

In response to the requests from our partners to establish a direct dialogue with our Ukrainian colleagues, I should like to recall that in this regard the President of the Russian Federation issued instructions to maintain working contacts with the various acting ministers of the Ukrainian State appointed by the Verkhovna Rada. Such contacts are being maintained, including with the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Sergey Lavrov. A meeting will be held in the near future at the deputy minister level.

Thank you for your attention.