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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE
1303rd MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL
VIA VIDEO TELECONFERENCE**

18 February 2021

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

Madam Chairperson,

Six years have passed since the adoption, on 17 February 2015, of United Nations Security Council resolution 2202, which endorsed the Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements. Shortly before that anniversary, the Russian Federation proposed to the OSCE participating States that the Permanent Council should make a brief but meaningful statement in support of the aforementioned resolution. To our profound regret, this initiative did not receive the support of the representatives of a number of countries, which are evidently pursuing the goal of pushing through their own conception – a conception that has nothing in common with the content of the resolution or the text of the Package of Measures.

At the thematic meeting of the United Nations Security Council on 11 February, which was devoted to reviewing the implementation of that key document of the process for settling the crisis in Ukraine, the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine and in the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG), Heidi Grau, and the Chief Monitor of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, Yaşar Halit Çevik, who is also the co-ordinator of the TCG Working Group on Security Issues, confirmed that the status of the settlement process cannot be described as satisfactory. Despite an unprecedented reduction in the number of violations of the ceasefire regime after measures to strengthen that regime entered into force on 27 July 2020, one senses a lack of political will to move forward in resolving the conflict – and, as a result, also a lack of appreciable progress in tackling other security issues and achieving practical results in the political, socio-economic and humanitarian fields.

The discussions on the settlement process have effectively come to a standstill, as confirmed by, among other things, the meetings of the TCG and its working groups that took place on 16 and 17 February: despite the efforts of the co-ordinators of the negotiation process, these meetings concluded without any significant results. The Ukrainian central authorities continue to duck out of substantive, results-oriented direct dialogue with the representatives of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions – this despite the fact that the Ukrainian Government has confirmed in writing that it recognizes these representatives as authorized participants in the settlement process, namely when it signed the minutes summing up the TCG meeting of 11 March 2020.

Analysis of what is going on invites the conclusion that the Ukrainian authorities are at present not interested in achieving a peaceful, political and diplomatic settlement of the conflict on the basis of full implementation of the Package of Measures. What is more, their very failure to implement the latter is instrumental, as may be inferred from the remarks made by Ukrainian officials, to their attempts to tackle issues that are quite unrelated to achieving peace in Donbas.

Suffice it to recall the words uttered by President Zelenskyy just over a month ago in an interview with the magazine *Focus*, where he said that “I personally would withdraw from the Minsk agreements”, adding that he could not do so “just like that”, however, because “European sanctions on Russia and the representatives of certain areas of Donbas might otherwise be lifted.”

The remarks made last weekend by the Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine, Mr. Andriy Yermak, while on air on the television channel *Ukraina* are most telling. As he sees it, it is impossible to implement the Minsk agreements “in the version in which they exist today”.

The head of the Ukrainian delegation to the TCG, Leonid Kravchuk, stated in an interview with the *Novoe Vremya* media outlet that “the Minsk agreements cannot be implemented, for obvious reasons”, adding that “this is also because when they were signed, it was already clear that they would not be implemented.”

One could cite the numerous pronouncements by the first deputy head of the Ukrainian delegation to the TCG, Oleksiy Reznikov, who is also Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Reintegration, in which he has called for the text of the Minsk agreements to be amended. He confirmed his stance at a press briefing on 15 February, where he pointed out: “As a lawyer, I don’t like the text of the Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements, particularly paragraph 9, which deals with the sequence whereby local elections in Donbas are to be held first, followed by the transfer of control over the border between Ukraine and Russia. At the very least, this paragraph needs to be updated and revised, as otherwise, it is quite impracticable in its current version.”

Lastly, it is telling that, in September 2020, President Zelenskyy dismissed the then first deputy head of the Ukrainian delegation to the TCG, Vitold Fokin, on the next day after Mr. Fokin had spoken at the Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian Parliament) about the need to adhere to the letter and the spirit of the Package of Measures.

Ukraine is thus the only participant in the settlement process whose representatives methodically assert that they do not regard implementation of the Minsk agreements as being possible. What is more, over in Kyiv they expatiate, like Mr. Yermak a few days ago, on their striving to implement various “principles enshrined in the Minsk agreements”, as they put it – that is, not the document itself, which was endorsed by the United Nations Security Council, but some “principles” that have not actually been set down anywhere. We concur with the assessment voiced by, among others, Ms. Grau, that the reason for the lack of progress in the settlement process is a deficiency in political will.

Not a single one of the paragraphs of the Package of Measures has been fully implemented so far. This notwithstanding, a number of legislative initiatives are being executed in Kyiv that stand in direct contradiction to its provisions. I am referring, in particular, to the law on the so-called reintegration of Donbas that entered into force in February 2018; the laws on the State language and on education; the Verkhovna Rada’s resolution of 15 July 2020, which ruled out the possibility of holding local elections in certain areas of Donbas; the draft law prepared by the Ministry of Reintegration on the “State policy of the transitional period”; the approval of the so-called “concept for the economic development of Donbas” and so

on. Furthermore, over the past few months the Ukrainian Government and members of parliament from the ruling party have submitted draft laws to the Verkhovna Rada on internment and dual citizenship, which are essentially aimed at depriving residents of Donbas who have another nationality in addition to Ukrainian citizenship of opportunities to take part in the processes of public and political life.

In view of this, the position taken by a number of countries that are conniving in the sabotage against the implementation of the Package of Measures and United Nations Security Council resolution 2202 is highly objectionable. France and Germany, both participants in the Normandy format, are in no rush to assert their international authority so as to secure the Ukrainian Government's commitment to the logic of the Package of Measures. One cannot but draw historical parallels to the agreement of 21 February 2014 on the settlement of the political crisis in Ukraine, for which representatives of those very two States acted as guarantors. I would remind you that not a single one of that agreement's clauses was implemented, leading to an aggravation of the crisis and the unconstitutional overthrow of the Government at the time, which was followed by a wave of armed civil confrontation.

Nowadays, though, as part of attempts to portray the conflict in the east of the country as one between Russia and Ukraine, some prefer to forget about – or even to disregard completely – the residents of Donbas themselves, who did not agree with the outcomes of the 2014 coup d'état, yet are seeking to engage in dialogue with the Ukrainian authorities through their representatives in the TCG.

We emphasize that the residents of Donbas must not be held to ransom by the geopolitical intrigues that are being carried out by forces from outside the region, and in which Ukraine has found itself caught up since 2014. Any further pandering to the militaristic rhetoric of the “war party” in Kyiv – and that is in fact what failure to respond to the overt sabotaging of the Package of Measures amounts to – would mean that the sponsors of the current Ukrainian authorities must be considered to bear a significant share of the responsibility for the continued suffering of the civilian population. The potential escalation of the violence along the line of contact in Donbas is fraught with unforeseeable consequences.

Thank you for your attention.