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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE
1335th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

16 September 2021

**In response to the address by the President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly,
Ms. Margareta Cederfelt**

Ms. Cederfelt,

Your report is frankly disappointing. The non-consensus language and the rigidity and one-sidedness of your assessments of the state of affairs in the OSCE area were puzzling. One has the impression that, under your leadership, the Assembly has no intention of helping to work out compromises with regard to the problems that have accumulated in our Organization's area of responsibility.

In view of the tactless remarks made about the forthcoming elections in Russia, we would emphasize that the Parliamentary Assembly's refusal to monitor electoral processes in our country is ill-founded and politicized. The enforced restriction on the size of the observation mission is due to the coronavirus pandemic and the need to ensure the safety of all those taking part in the electoral process. This measure applies to all foreign organizations and does not contravene Russia's international obligations, including its OSCE commitments.

The take-it-or-leave-it tone of the assertions implying that the number of observers is to be determined by the experts from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) themselves and that the participating States allegedly have no say in this matter is outrageous. We would ask you to explain where you have got this idea from. Instead of making unsubstantiated claims, can you quote relevant excerpts from the text of OSCE commitments? You'll find that you can't. There is no mention of this in the commitments, nor in the ODIHR's mandate. We would advise you to carefully reread paragraph 8 of the CSCE Copenhagen Document of 1990. It says: "The participating States consider that the presence of observers, both foreign and domestic, can enhance the electoral process for States in which elections are taking place. They therefore invite observers from any other CSCE participating States and any appropriate private institutions and organizations who may wish to do so to observe the course of their national election proceedings, to the extent permitted by law." I repeat: "to the extent permitted by law".

It is regrettable that some in this room are unaware that participating States have every right to adjust the composition of observation missions, and that the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the ODIHR should at least respect the established parameters for international observation of national elections. This is

especially the case during a pandemic. The desire to convince us otherwise indicates either blatant incompetence or an attempt to use the OSCE toolkit to interfere in the internal affairs of States. Incidentally, this is precisely how we view the reference to Belarus in your address.

Imposing an alleged “gold standard” by force simply won’t work. The OSCE has no consensus-based rules for election observation. And, accordingly, there is no obligation to adhere to any such rules. We regularly point this out both to the ODIHR and to our Western colleagues. We have consistently proposed that a methodology be developed and adopted by all participating States. The discussions have been going on for many years, but a well-known group of States keeps blocking this initiative. In view of these factors, no assessments or comments by the Assembly and the ODIHR regarding the organization of the voting at the elections in Russia and the electoral process in general can be treated as independent or credible.

We regret that in the context of the situation in Ukraine you, Ms. Cederfelt, have chosen to adopt an extremely politicized and confrontational tone. Such an approach does not tally with the Assembly’s original intended role of bringing participating States together and working collectively to find ways to build trust. Moreover, the assessments you have made do not correspond at all to the real situation on the ground. Before making such sweeping statements, we would recommend that you pay a personal visit to certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions and study the history of this issue through contact with those directly involved in the events.

We are also surprised at your attempts to draw the Assembly and the entire OSCE, including its field operations, into speculations about the status and national affiliation of territories. We would remind you that none of these structures, nor you yourself as President of the Assembly, are authorized by the OSCE participating States to make any assessments in this regard. Such reckless and unsubstantiated rhetoric is certainly not good for the OSCE’s credibility and, on the contrary, is destroying it. What is more, the authority of the Parliamentary Assembly itself is also being undermined.

With regard to Ukraine, you have not once mentioned the existence of the Minsk Package of Measures of 12 February 2015, which was endorsed by a United Nations Security Council resolution and has become part of international law. It remains the sole internationally recognized framework for resolving the internal crisis in that country, which should pave the way for sustainable and long-term peace in its eastern regions. We are convinced that it is impossible not to be aware of the existence of this key document of the settlement process. In the current circumstances, deliberately ignoring the Package of Measures only encourages the Ukrainian authorities to sabotage it, provokes further armed violence and increases the suffering of civilians.

In recent weeks, the Ukrainian military has intensified considerably its combat operations in Donbas. The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine has reported fresh casualties among the civilian population – and once again all on the outskirts of Donetsk and Luhansk. Read the Mission’s reports carefully. As President of the Assembly, you have opportunities to bring influence to bear on the situation. Instead of politicized speculations it would be much more helpful if you were to urge the authorities in Ukraine to put a stop to the armed violence in the conflict zone, strictly adhere to the existing ceasefire commitments and implement the Minsk agreements.

The situation in Ukraine should be assessed from an impartial position based on an objective analysis of what is happening in the eastern regions of the country. We expect the Parliamentary Assembly to use its potential in precisely that way.

The same applies to other conflicts as well. We are surprised that you expressed concern over “limited progress” on issues in the South Caucasus. There is nothing new about this. To date, there have been 53 rounds of the Geneva International Discussions on Security and Stability in the Trans-Caucasus, which have become the key and indeed sole platform for direct dialogue between the Georgian Government and the authorities in Sukhum and Tskhinval. I would remind you that this format was created pursuant to the well-known arrangements agreed on by Presidents Medvedev and Sarkozy with the clearly formulated task of discussing ways to ensure security and stability in the region. The key element in fulfilling this stipulation is to conclude a legally binding agreement on the non-use of force between Georgia on the one hand, and Abkhazia and South Ossetia on the other. We trust that the newly appointed OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Special Representative on the South Caucasus, Kari Henriksen, will be able to get to the heart of the matter so that you have a clear picture of the real state of affairs.

We agree that the people in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone need a durable peace rather than continuing hostility. It is hard to doubt that. However, we should like to inform you that a Russian peacekeeping contingent is currently engaged in ensuring peace “on the ground” in its area of responsibility. The website of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation provides a daily update on the work carried out since November 2020, which you can familiarize yourself with if you wish. At the present stage, the priority is to implement all the provisions of the trilateral statements agreed on at the highest level on 9 November 2020 and 11 January 2021. First and foremost, this concerns compliance with the ceasefire, resolving a number of humanitarian issues and unblocking economic and transport links in the region. All this taken together is intended to create conditions for the normalization of relations between the parties, notably in the context of the work of the three Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group.

Unfortunately, we see that the situation as regards the Transdnestrian settlement process is not only not giving grounds for optimism, but in the light of recent steps by individual participants in the negotiation process in the “5+2” format is showing a clear trend towards deterioration. We hope that your appeal is directed, among other things, towards resolving the problem that has arisen after 1 September and was provoked by Ukraine.

Let me turn briefly to the three dimensions. It is gratifying to see that combating terrorism, in particular the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters, remains a focus of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly’s attention.

As regards the second dimension, we are convinced that parliamentarians could play a constructive role in developing ways to enable a post-COVID-19 economic recovery and the rebuilding of the industries most affected by the pandemic, in particular the tourism industry. In turn, this would help to realize the fundamental functions of the Parliamentary Assembly, such as improving human contacts and enhancing understanding between peoples in the spirit of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act. It is still necessary to work on developing economic connectivity in the OSCE area and the alignment of integration processes with a view to establishing a “Greater Eurasian Partnership”.

We note a tendentiousness and bias in terms of the topics and countries singled out in the section of your report concerned with the human dimension. Essentially, it is a repetition of the nauseating human rights clichés that are promoted here by a well-known clique of States and have nothing to do with reality.

We call on the Assembly’s leadership to look objectively and honestly at what is happening in the OSCE area. There are many problems – the rise in neo-Nazism and aggressive nationalism, religious intolerance, the gross trampling underfoot of the linguistic and educational rights of national minorities, violations of social and economic rights and children’s rights, illegal migration, trafficking in human beings, and the deliberate erosion of family values. Please explain why there is no mention of this in your report.

Should we consider the silence on the problem of neo-Nazism as an attempt to whitewash or erase from memory the crimes of the Nazis and their henchmen?

There is a long-overdue need for the Assembly to seriously address the issue of arbitrary and opaque censorship of the global information space by digital platforms. By acting without direction from court rulings or decisions by the relevant authorities, the information technology giants are grossly violating the fundamental right of citizens, enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and also in the Helsinki Final Act, to freely seek, receive and impart information.

In closing, we recommend that all our colleagues reflect carefully on our discussion. We are convinced that the confrontational approach taken by Ms. Cederfelt is wrong. Such an approach could quickly lead us all to a diplomatic “wasteland”. Instead of ratcheting up tensions, serious thought should be given as to how to make more effective use of the multilateral mechanisms we have in place.

Thank you for your attention.