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PC.DEL/656/19
13 June 2019

ENGLISH
Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. DMITRY BALAKIN,
DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1232nd MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

13 June 2019

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

Mr. Chairperson,

Despite the expectations over the past few weeks, the process of resolving the crisis in Ukraine is still at an impasse. The signals coming from Ukraine's senior officials are very contradictory. It would appear that there is still no consolidated understanding in Kyiv of the ultimate goals of a settlement.

The positive developments that emerged at the meeting of the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) in Minsk on 5 June have not been supported by real action. Furthermore, supporters of the former President are using the levers available to them to influence the Ukrainian negotiators appointed by the new authorities, in effect trying to pull the emergency brake on the entire Minsk process. The statement by the current Prosecutor General of Ukraine, Yuriy Lutsenko, about his opening of criminal proceedings in connection with the discussion last week in Minsk of issues related to the need for a ceasefire and the resumption of economic ties with Donbas was revealing.

In Kyiv they are mechanically seeking to justify their "foot-dragging" in the implementation of the Minsk Package of Measures in their preferred style, saying that certain external factors are hindering internal Ukrainian dialogue. A recent example was the clumsy attempt to distract attention from their responsibility for the shelling of a mosque in Donetsk on 4 June. It is located close to the line of contact in range of the Ukrainian armed forces' guns. The main reason for the difficulties in the dialogue between the authorities in Kyiv, Donetsk and Luhansk is in fact the lack of political will on the part of Ukraine or the lack of tools for its implementation. In the context of the electoral campaign that is in fact under way in Ukraine for the elections to the Verkhovna Rada, they are once again trying to make the fate of the inhabitants of Donbas a bargaining chip in the political infighting.

Mr. Chairperson,

We are seriously concerned about the situation with the implementation of the TCG Framework Decision on Disengagement of Forces and Hardware of 21 September 2016.

We note with regret that the Ukrainian security forces once again disrupted the disengagement in the area near Stanytsia Luhanska, on which agreement was reached between the representatives of the

authorities in Kyiv, Donetsk and Luhansk on 5 June in the Minsk-based TCG Working Group on Security Issues. It was due to take place on 10 June. According to the representatives of certain areas of the Luhansk region, on that day the militia signalled their readiness for disengagement for at least the 80th time. However, the Ukrainian side refused to do so, citing non-compliance with the condition it had set – a seven-day period of complete ceasefire. In this context, it was pointed out that the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) had reported an “undetermined explosion” inside the disengagement area on 7 June.

We believe it is important that the SMM Deputy Chief Monitor, Mark Etherington, paid a subsequent visit to Stanytsia Luhanska, where he was able to go to both sides of the line of contact. We urge the Mission to investigate in the most thorough way possible the aforementioned incident involving the use of weapons and to provide an appropriate assessment of it. This will make it possible to determine which side was responsible for disrupting the disengagement. It is noteworthy that, since the agreement of the Framework Decision on disengagement, the Ukrainian armed forces have simply sabotaged this process, despite the fact that the SMM has confirmed compliance with these seven-day periods of silence more than 55 times.

The situation also remains difficult in Zolote, where the Mission continues to record the presence of Ukrainian military equipment and violations of the ceasefire regime. According to the SMM, the number of ceasefire violations near this area is increasing, including the use of weapons prohibited by the Minsk agreements. On 6 June, fire was directed at an SMM mini unmanned aerial vehicle over territory controlled by the Ukrainian armed forces in Zolote. On 9 June, an SMM patrol near the village of Molodizhne was fired at. According to the Mission’s report, the firing came from a westerly direction, where Ukrainian armed forces are stationed. We regard as unacceptable the attempts to restrict the Mission’s monitoring inside and near the disengagement areas. Nor is it acceptable for these areas to be closed to the SMM under the pretext of a threat from mines.

The Ukrainian armed forces continue to move heavy weaponry into Donbas. For example, over the past week at the Rubizhne railway station alone in the Luhansk region, the SMM reported the movement of 11 tanks, 20 howitzers and 6 anti-tank guns. It comes as no surprise that the shelling of residential areas has not subsided. The Mission reported damage to several residential buildings in Zolote-5/Mykhailivka. Since the beginning of 2019, the SMM has documented no less than 45 instances of damage to homes and civilian infrastructure facilities in that village, including sensitive sites such as schools and hospitals. Recently, Iuliia Mendel, spokesperson for the President of Ukraine, admitted that the Ukrainian armed forces had indeed shelled schools and hospitals, allegedly in response to being shelled themselves. Despite regular reports by the SMM on the consequences of the shelling, the Ukrainian security forces continue to point their guns at the same non-military targets. In a recent interview, the new Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Ruslan Khomchak, said that there had been no orders not to shoot nor would any such orders be given.

In violation of Point 8 of the Minsk Package of Measures, the Ukrainian authorities continue to restrict daily life in Donbas by imposing a socio-economic and transport blockade on the region. I would remind you that Point 8 stipulates that practical measures should be taken to ensure the full resumption of socio-economic ties, including social security benefits and cash transfers. The Ukrainian Government’s actions target the most vulnerable segments of the population in Donbas, despite the fact that it refers to this population as “Ukrainian citizens” at every opportunity.

In an attempt to overcome the artificial difficulties created by the Ukrainian authorities, people are forced to make trips across the line of contact. It is easy to understand that precisely Ukraine’s failure to implement Point 8 of the Minsk Package of Measures is one of the main reasons for the queues at the

checkpoints and the tragic incidents connected with this. According to the SMM, 22 people have died at these checkpoints since the beginning of 2019, 20 of whom were pensioners. We urge the Mission to closely monitor all the consequences of the restrictive measures imposed by the Ukrainian Government on its own citizens in Donbas.

Under these circumstances and against the backdrop of the absence of appeals to the Ukrainian Government to lift the blockade on Donbas, the calls by a number of OSCE participating States for the opening of new checkpoints along the line of contact appear rather strange. It is important to understand that in the current circumstances it is precisely the lifting of the blockade that will make it possible to lessen the burden considerably on the existing checkpoints. To that end, it is necessary to step up the negotiation process between the authorities in Kyiv, Donetsk and Luhansk in the Trilateral Contact Group – both on the resumption of economic ties and on improving the throughput capacity at the line of contact. We trust that the parties will take a constructive approach at the next TCG meeting on 19 June.

Mr. Chairperson,

The Minsk Package of Measures of 12 February 2015, endorsed by United Nations Security Council resolution 2202, is the sole framework for a settlement of the internal Ukrainian crisis. It is important that the new Ukrainian leadership, which is verbally declaring its intention to end the conflict in eastern Ukraine, does not seek, like the previous authorities, artificial pretexts for sabotaging the Minsk process and does not try to turn the implementation of the Minsk Package of Measures into some kind of capitulation on the part of Ukraine. Each day the settlement is delayed leads to further destruction and suffering of the civilian population. We urge that appropriate influence be exerted on the Ukrainian authorities to encourage them to engage in direct and honest dialogue with Donbas, on the basis of which it will be possible to implement the provisions of the Minsk Package of Measures in a full and co-ordinated manner.

Thank you for your attention.