

PC.DEL/650/17

18 May 2017

ENGLISH

Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. DMITRY BALAKIN,  
DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE  
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1146th MEETING OF THE  
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

18 May 2017

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

Mr. Chairperson,

The situation in the Donbas conflict zone remains extremely tense.

In the course of the week, the Ukrainian security forces violated the ceasefire regime on more than 250 occasions and shelled at least nine militia-controlled towns and villages. The use of multiple-launch rocket systems by the security forces in Svitlodarsk – 152 rounds on the night of 13 May – was recorded by the monitors. The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) camera in Avdiivka recorded that the large-scale exchanges of fire on the night of 12 to 13 May began with a projectile in flight from north-west to south-east, in other words they were initiated by the Ukrainian armed forces. Such provocations occur constantly. By launching skirmishes in populated areas along the line of contact, the Ukrainian security forces are endangering the lives of the civilian population on both sides of the line.

We call for the immediate and strict implementation of the Minsk Package of Measures, which remains the only framework for a settlement. The disengagement of forces and hardware will be an important step towards ensuring a complete ceasefire at the line of contact. This process has been delayed by continuing provocations on the part of the Ukrainian armed forces inside the Stanytsia Luhanska disengagement area. In the early hours of 10 May, the SMM camera installed there recorded a rocket-propelled grenade launcher round fired from security force positions. We hope that today the Ukrainian armed forces will finally carry out the disengagement of forces in that area, as was agreed at the meeting of the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) on 15 May. This should be followed by the creation of new disengagement areas.

We draw attention to the need for strict compliance with the Package of Measures and the Addendum regarding the withdrawal of military equipment. Since 10 May, SMM monitors have recorded new units of Ukrainian weaponry in violation of the withdrawal lines: 16 self-propelled howitzers in Kremenivka, 12 self-propelled howitzers in Zelene Pole,

5 Grad multiple-launch rocket systems in Khibodarivka, 5 howitzers, a mortar and boxes of ammunition in Lebedynske, 5 self-propelled howitzers in Tarasivka and 6 anti-tank guns in Zhelanne.

According to the militia, the Ukrainian armed forces are actively using unmanned aerial vehicles at the line of contact, including US-made ones. Photographs of a Shadow unmanned aerial vehicle downed by the militia on 5 May on the southern flank of the line of contact have been posted on the Internet.

Long before the explosion involving the SMM vehicle on 23 April near Pryshyb, access for the monitors was completely restricted by the Ukrainian security forces under the pretext of the threat posed by mines in the areas around Stanytsia Luhanska, Shchastia, Popasna, Bohdanivka and Katerynivka.

We should like once again to emphasize that the safety of the SMM monitors is our absolute priority.

We urge the Ukrainian Government to co-operate fully with the Luhansk authorities conducting the investigation into the explosion involving the SMM vehicle on 23 April.

In the interests of a peaceful settlement, the Ukrainian security forces should stop their sabotage activities in militia-controlled territory.

We recall that there has still been no response to the information provided in the SMM's reports dated 4 March and 1 April regarding armed men in military-type uniforms, who were using a white sport utility vehicle with stickers imitating the colour and design of the OSCE logo in territory controlled by the Ukrainian armed forces in Avdiivka.

A long-term sustainable settlement of the intra-Ukrainian conflict is impossible unless steps in the military sphere are supplemented with measures of a political nature, as stipulated in the Package of Measures. The inhabitants of Donbas need to have their rights guaranteed. At the TCG meetings, Ukraine is demonstrating its unwillingness to move forward. On 15 May, the Ukrainian Government's negotiators once again under a fabricated pretext refused to set out on paper the Steinmeier formula regarding the procedure for granting Donbas special status and holding local elections there.

We trust that the parties will finally begin to implement at least the paragraph on the exchange of prisoners and detained persons on the basis of the "all for all" principle. We are in favour of the Ukrainian Government completely lifting the "border" checkpoint regime at the line of contact, which, according to the SMM, results in queues of up to 2,000 people gathering en masse.

We once again call on our Western colleagues to use their significant influence on the Ukrainian Government to put an end to the bloodshed in Donbas, which has already resulted in tens of thousands of wounded and dead, millions of displaced persons and widespread destruction. No matter how painful it is for the Ukrainian authorities to implement the Minsk agreements, this is the only way to prevent an even greater disaster in Ukraine.

Mr. Chairperson,

Manifestations of radical nationalism and gross violations of human rights in Ukraine require close attention on the part of the SMM and other OSCE executive structures. The Ukrainian Government continues to take self-destructive steps to deepen the conflicts on the territory of Ukraine along national, religious, cultural and value-based lines.

The harassment of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is threatening to cause a serious split in Ukrainian society. The SMM reports record facts indicating a policy of forced confiscation of church property, as exemplified by the case of the church in Ptycha in the Rivne region. That resulted in dramatic confrontation. However, the topic is far broader than this and the OSCE should pay considerably more attention to it.

Today, on 18 May, there are plans to place two draft laws on the agenda of the Verkhovna Rada meeting. In the event that they are adopted, an unprecedented discriminatory practice towards the majority of Ukraine's Orthodox population will be legitimized. This will be a glaring example of the trampling of human rights and freedom of religious belief as well as a violation of international norms and commitments and the Constitution of Ukraine. This is not the first time that attempts are being made by the Ukrainian Government to draw the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – the largest in the country – into political confrontation. Another step in this direction will fuel the civil conflict in Ukraine, giving it a religious dimension, and will undoubtedly complicate the implementation of the Minsk agreements.

We expect an unequivocal response from the other leaders of the Normandy format countries, the Austrian OSCE Chairmanship (a message from Metropolitan Hilarion has been sent to Foreign Minister Kurz), the executive structures of our Organization and the participating States to what is undoubtedly an emergency situation. On the basis of this response we will judge how sincere and consistent they are in defending OSCE norms and principles.

On 15 May, the Ukrainian National Security Council decision on the introduction of new restrictive measures regarding a number of physical persons and legal entities entered into force. The popular Russian-language search engine Yandex, the Mail.ru webmail service, the Russian-language social media sites VKontakte and Odnoklassniki and a number of Russian media have been banned in Ukraine. These actions, which are at odds with Ukraine's commitments in the area of human rights and freedom of speech, have further restricted the right of the country's Russian-speaking population to free access to information and to communicate in their mother tongue. For some reason, we are not hearing in this room any indignation on the part of the Western countries, which are traditionally concerned about freedom of speech.

The St. George's ribbon – one of the symbols of the victory over Nazism – is now also prohibited in Ukraine. This is outrageous and regrettable, but it should not surprise anyone given that Russophobia, the promotion of neo-Nazism and the erasing of historical memory in Ukraine have been elevated to the level of State policy.

Thank you for your attention.