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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1247th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

14 November 2019

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

Mr. Chairperson,

The continuing process of disengagement of forces and hardware in Zolote and Petrivske inspires cautious optimism. In this regard, at various levels we hear very flattering remarks about the Ukrainian Government. The steps it has taken are presented almost as concessions to the militia in matters of de-escalation. However, everything that is being so zealously credited to the Ukrainian Government today is nothing but a remedying of the violations committed by the Ukrainian armed forces. As you may recall, following the disengagement that took place in these areas in 2016, the Ukrainian security forces established and consolidated new combat positions inside these areas. Today it is important that the subunits that have been withdrawn do not have an opportunity to quickly return to the positions they have left, as was the case in 2018. We trust that the next stages of the disengagement – dismantling of fortifications and demining – will take place in accordance with the schedule agreed on in the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) and will then be verified by the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM). It is this verification that will make it possible to speak of the successful completion of the disengagement process in the three pilot areas and to start agreeing on new ones.

We urge the Ukrainian Government not to obstruct monitoring in the disengagement areas, including the operation of the SMM's technical monitoring equipment, as was the case on 10 and 11 November when an SMM unmanned aerial vehicle's signal was jammed over Bohdanivka in territory controlled by the Ukrainian armed forces or when barbed wire was placed near an SMM camera in Stanytsia Luhanska in early November.

We once again urge the Ukrainian Government to take a responsible approach to the honouring of the commitments agreed on in the TCG. It is now important to ensure that there are no armed individuals inside the disengagement areas capable of violating the "silence regime". Their presence there could defeat the whole purpose of the disengagement of forces in Donbas.

We note the comment by the Chargé d'Affaires ad interim of the United States of America for Ukraine, William Taylor, during his visit to Zolote on 7 November as part of a group of ambassadors. According to him, following the withdrawal of the Ukrainian military from the disengagement area in Zolote, the Ukrainian police and National Guard should move into this area. Yet, the objective of this

disengagement is precisely to rule out the possibility of the use of any weapons inside these areas. Such incitement, in violation of the spirit of the agreements reached in Minsk between the Ukrainian Government and the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk, suggests that the United States is not at all interested in a speedy settlement of the devastating internal Ukrainian crisis, but rather in maintaining instability in the country.

The real purpose of stoking militaristic sentiments in Ukraine can be observed in the recent statement by the US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, in an interview with the television station WCSC-TV. He claimed that the United States “gave them [the Ukrainians] real weapons where they could fight against the Russians”. This can be interpreted as war propaganda and incitement to inter-ethnic discord, which grossly violates the letter and the spirit of the Charter of the United Nations, the provisions of a host of international conventions and other obligations. One should also be aware of the consequences of such statements and the possible increase in tension, violence and casualties.

Stagnation in the political settlement of the internal Ukrainian crisis continues. Despite the agreement in the TCG of the “Steinmeier formula” on the procedure for the entry into force of the law on the special status of Donbas, the leadership of Ukraine has still not taken practical steps to implement it in its national legislation. The law on special status is still not functioning. Furthermore, the period for which it was adopted ends in one and a half months, on 31 December.

Against this backdrop, the Ukrainian Government is attempting to move the main discussions on key aspects to the “Normandy format”. At the same time, it should agree on the extension of the law on special status and the enshrining of this status in the Constitution of Ukraine through direct dialogue with the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk, which is also provided for in the Minsk Package of Measures. No progress whatsoever has been made in such things as an amnesty for those involved in the events in Donbas or with regard to determining modalities for holding local elections there.

Meanwhile, a different rhetoric can be heard in Kyiv. Many of the current Ukrainian leadership’s arguments – in terms both of a settlement in Donbas and of foreign policy priorities, as well as the linguistic, religious, cultural and many other rights of the inhabitants of Ukraine – have in fact proved to be the familiar narratives that the administration of the former President, Petro Poroshenko, actively promoted without any regard for public opinion. The reckless and discriminatory policy of the previous authorities led to an impressive vote by Ukrainians for change in the presidential and parliamentary elections this year. Volodymyr Zelenskyi and his political force received a solid mandate of confidence, above all to achieve peace in Donbas and resolve the socio-political crisis in the country as a whole.

However, people are still waiting for signs of a rapid movement towards peace. This has had an impact on the level of support for the current Ukrainian authorities, as confirmed by recent surveys published by the Razumkov Centre in Kyiv. According to a study, fewer and fewer Ukrainians believe that the country is moving in the right direction. Over the past two months, the number of people who support the course pursued by the Ukrainian Government has dropped by 20 per to 37 per cent. People are concerned that the new leadership is continuing many of the discriminatory practices of the previous authorities.

The continuing clampdown on freedom of speech in Ukraine is alarming. Those media outlets and their staff who dare to express an alternative point of view to the official one are put through the “mangle” of persecution. In late October, the Security Service of Ukraine initiated two criminal proceedings against the Russian journalist, Vladimir Solovyov, for his televised statements. The Cabinet of Ministers was instructed by the presidential decree of 8 November to develop some “provisions on the requirements and standards of news” by the end of the year. What is this if not censorship?

Many murders of journalists remain unsolved. In these conditions, it is particularly cynical to give the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, Anton Herashchenko, responsibility on behalf of the Ministry for contacts with the media and the organization of journalists' safety. I would remind you that it was Mr. Herashchenko who in 2014 established the scandalous website Mirotvorets, which is still operating, now on servers in the United States, and on which the personal details of Ukrainian and foreign reporters are posted. This information is often used to restrict their professional activity and freedom of movement. Some of those who ended up on these lists, such as Oles Buzina, have been killed, and the perpetrators have yet to be punished.

One further point. On 7 November, the Third Committee of the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution on combating the glorification of Nazism. This year, it was co-sponsored by 61 States. A total of 121 States voted in favour of the resolution, and only two – the United States and Ukraine – voted against it. Such a destructive position by Ukraine is very depressing in the light of the recent upsurges in aggressive Ukrainian nationalism in the once peaceful city of Odessa. The impunity of the radicals encourages them to carry out new acts of intimidation of the population. The Ukrainian authorities are actually fostering such antics by blocking initiatives to intensify the investigation of the crimes that occurred in Trade Union House in Odessa on 2 May 2014. Concerns about the investigation of the case expressed by a number of international institutions, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Council of Europe International Advisory Panel, are not being taken into account either. So far, neither the organizers, nor the instigators, nor the actual perpetrators of the burning alive of dozens of peaceful protesters in that building have been identified. All this leads to sorry conclusions about the direction the country is taking.

On a final note, the path to peace in Ukraine is through reconciliation with the civilian population and guarantees for the observance of the rights of all the country's inhabitants, regardless of their ethnic, linguistic or religious affiliation. Mutually respectful dialogue between the Ukrainian Government and the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk, which is a necessary condition for the full implementation of all the provisions of the Minsk Package of Measures of 12 February 2015, endorsed by the UN Security Council, will be the key to lasting peace in eastern Ukraine. The leadership of Ukraine needs a clear strategy for moving forward on the path to a peaceful settlement, and not statements like those heard today in a BBC interview with the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Vadym Prystaiko, on the possibility of withdrawing from the Minsk process. The choice in favour of civil harmony and a peaceful future today lies entirely in the hands of the Ukrainian Government.

Thank you for your attention.