

PC.DEL/1688/17
14 December 2017

ENGLISH
Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1168th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

14 December 2017

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

Mr. Chairperson,

The negotiations on a draft OSCE Vienna Ministerial Council declaration on the Ukrainian crisis highlighted the continuing attempts to distort the meaning of the Minsk agreements and devalue their political part. A comprehensive political settlement, as set out in the Package of Measures, ought to bring stability to Ukraine. This settlement calls for constitutional reform, consolidating the special status of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, along with local elections, the enactment of the amnesty law and non-prosecution in connection with the events in Donbas.

We were interested in adopting a document that would have underpinned the Package of Measures with the consensus support of the 57 participating States in addition to United Nations Security Council resolution 2202, and would have provided a proper assessment of the activities of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), the Trilateral Contact Group and its working groups. However, some participating States had no interest in this.

The slogans about what the Ukrainians refer to as “Russian aggression” are a propaganda cover for the desire to maintain the conflict. We will know that there is a willingness to really achieve a peaceful settlement of the Ukrainian crisis when we see steps to end the punitive operation against the inhabitants of Donbas, and efforts to curb rather than legitimize the nationalists provoking exchanges of fire at the line of contact and engaged in violence and looting.

We condemn the “creeping offensive” by the Ukrainian security forces. The SMM has confirmed the occupation by the Ukrainian armed forces of villages in what is known as the “grey zone”. Using satellites and unmanned aerial vehicles, the SMM has recorded traces of military equipment leading from Ukrainian armed forces’ positions to Travneve and Hladosove, and also three military camps with military equipment belonging to the Ukrainian armed forces on the outskirts of these villages. The monitors discovered Ukrainian armed

forces' positions on the southern outskirts of Verkhnyotoretske and a massing of personnel in Svitlodarsk.

In violation of the Minsk Package of Measures, over the past two weeks, 28 units of weaponry belonging to the Ukrainian armed forces were discovered in the security zone: nine self-propelled artillery pieces in Oleksandropil, five howitzers in Kremenivka, two howitzers and a multiple-launch rocket system in Volnovakha, three howitzers in Vodiane, three howitzers Netailove, two howitzers in Novoselivka Druha, one surface-to-air missile system in Roty, one tank in Popasna and one surface-to-air missile system in Novohnativka.

Despite repeated attempts, the SMM monitors have still not been able to access Travneve and Hladosove, because the Ukrainian side is refusing to let them do so. No one knows what is happening in those villages now. If we look at the latest report on Ukraine by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, it is not hard to imagine what is going on there – looting, torture and intimidation. For the most part, under the pretext of the threat of mines, the SMM's freedom of movement in territory controlled by the Ukrainian armed forces is significantly restricted. This makes it impossible to record the real number of weapons belonging to the Ukrainian armed forces at the line of contact. More than half of all the restrictions on the monitors' work between 27 November and 11 December were the result of mines in territory controlled by the Ukrainian armed forces. There are also instances when the monitors are directly prohibited from accessing certain areas – as was the case on 2 December, when the security forces did not allow them to access storage sites in Kostiantynivka on two occasions.

The SMM should not be afraid of exerting pressure on the host country. The SMM's work should be carried out in full accordance with the principles of objectivity and impartiality. As the SMM Chief Monitor Ertuğrul Apakan confirmed, this is the key to support for the Mission. We encourage the Mission's leadership and monitors to be bolder in their contacts with representatives of the local authorities in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions on all issues falling within the SMM's remit.

The occupation by the security forces of two villages near the line of contact and the attempted attack on Frunze have resulted in a sharp increase in violations of the ceasefire regime. During the period from 27 November to 12 December, the SMM recorded around 9,000 ceasefire regime violations and 12 instances of shelling of militia-controlled settlements from directions where the Ukrainian armed forces are stationed. Three civilians were injured and at least 12 houses and other buildings were damaged in Dokuchaievsk, Trudivski, Holmivskiyi, Yasne, Pervomaisk, Dovhe, Yasynuvata and Zelena Roshcha.

According to the SMM, in the early hours of 13 December, the Ukrainian armed forces opened fire using 152 mm artillery prohibited under the Minsk agreements in close proximity to an SMM patrol base in Popasna. It cannot be ruled out that this provocation was intended to elicit return fire, which could have threatened the safety of the monitors.

According to the media, the concentrated gunfire from Popasna was directed towards Stakhanov and Pervomaisk. In addition, Luhansk was subjected to massive shelling by the Ukrainian armed forces, resulting in damage to around 20 apartment buildings. We expect timely information from the SMM about the shelling of Luhansk, Stakhanov and Pervomaisk.

The Ukrainian Government continues to sabotage the disengagement of forces in Stanytsia Luhanska. At the last meeting of the Trilateral Contact Group on 5 December, Ukrainian representatives were unable to agree on a new date for the disengagement of forces, whereas the militia announced that they were ready for a withdrawal at any time. However, each time the next date for the disengagement draws closer, the Ukrainian Government arranges a provocation, this time on 7 December. Exchanges of fire within the disengagement area at Petrivske have become almost a daily occurrence.

We expect implementation to the letter of the agreements on the exchange of prisoners, without any “dead souls” in the lists and other tricks. During a videoconference of the Working Group on Humanitarian Issues on 12 December, the Ukrainian Government was unable to confirm the list of persons for exchange or the legal procedure for the clearance of prisoners, and could not even talk with certainty about the terms of the exchange.

With great difficulty, it proved possible to repair the wooden ramps of the destroyed bridge span near Stanytsia Luhanska. We are grateful to the SMM and all those involved. Unfortunately, the Ukrainian Government is still unwilling to agree to the repair of the bridge’s metal structure under the International Committee of the Red Cross project.

The exacerbation of the situation in Donbas once again goes hand in hand with the increasing unrest in Kyiv. According to the SMM, up to 10,000 people are protesting against the Government and calling for the President’s impeachment. Members of the Donbas punitive battalion in helmets and flak jackets along with members of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and Right Sector were seen among the protesters. Rocket flares, smoke bombs, barbed wire and tyres were put to use. All that is missing are the sandwiches from Western partners, without which the protest cannot really get started. The situation surrounding Mikheil Saakashvili, known for his penchant for reckless ventures and provocations, is alarming. With a view to early warning and pre-emption, we propose discussing the situation in Kyiv in greater detail at Permanent Council meetings.

We call on the SMM monitors and writers of reports to follow the situation outside the conflict zone more closely and in greater detail.

The Ukrainian Government’s attempts to Ukrainianize the cultural, educational and information space by force remains a powerful destabilizing factor. We are witnessing an intensification of nationalist conflicts with Ukraine’s other neighbours.

The opinion issued by the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission of the Council of Europe) on 11 December regarding the Ukrainian law on education points in particular to the fact that it “provides no solution for languages which are not official languages of the EU, in particular the Russian language, as the most widely used language apart from the state language.” “The less favourable treatment of these languages is difficult to justify and therefore raises issues of discrimination.” According to the Venice Commission experts, the most appropriate solution would be to replace this provision of Article 7 with “a more balanced and more clearly worded one”.

Mr. Chairperson,

I should like to focus on the Ukrainian Government’s actions aimed at undermining the mechanisms to facilitate a settlement of the conflict. Ukraine is doing everything possible

to destabilize the Joint Centre for Control and Co-ordination (JCCC) by refusing to establish rules of procedure for the JCCC. Following a decision by the Ukrainian authorities, representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk who were working in territory controlled by the Ukrainian armed forces and had been involved in the JCCC since the initial stage have been withdrawn from the Centre's team. There are regular obstacles to the work of the Russian officers: restrictions on their movements, the insistence on constant escorting and pat-down searches. The new rules for crossing the border, which the Ukrainian Government plans to introduce for Russian citizens, will make further work by the Russian JCCC officers on Ukrainian territory impossible.

In conclusion, we should like once again to draw attention to the main and only framework for a settlement of the Ukrainian crisis, namely the Minsk agreements. The head of the Ukrainian Ministry of Internal Affairs Arsen Avakov announced that they are "dead", and his adviser Anton Gerashchenko admitted that the Ukrainian delegation had simply deceived everyone in Minsk. They are indeed the ones telling the truth, and the claims, including the ones heard here, that the Ukrainian Government is allegedly implementing something are groundless. This can be seen clearly not only in the Trilateral Contact Group, where the Ukrainian Government is avoiding effective direct dialogue with Donetsk and Luhansk, but also in the Normandy format, where work on a road map continues to be undermined.

Thank you for your attention.