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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1266th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL
VIA VIDEO TELECONFERENCE**

7 May 2020

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

Mr. Chairperson,

The events of the past few days have yet again caused us to shudder at the inordinately high price that the inhabitants of Donbas are having to pay for the Ukrainian Government's ongoing military operation.

As to who exactly the Ukrainian army is fighting against, that is clearly shown by the grim statistics on casualties and destruction in Donbas. Over the past week, all the instances of shelling that, in addition to physical damage, involved human casualties were registered exclusively in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Once again, civilians and their homes, together with social infrastructure, came under fire and shelling from the Ukrainian armed forces.

On 30 April, the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) registered the damage caused by the latest shelling of a school in Zolote-5/Mykhailivka: the building had been hit by rounds from a 120 mm mortar and heavy-machine-gun fire.

On 1 May, a woman was killed by gunfire in the settlement of Spartak in the Donetsk region. According to reports by the media that have yet to be reflected in the official SMM reports, a residential building in Zolote-5/Mykhailivka (Luhansk region) was shelled on 2 May. There were five young children inside the building at the time, and as a result of this barbaric attack a seven-year-old girl was injured. As reported, the SMM patrol that arrived on the scene to register the damage caused was compelled, for security reasons, to leave the settlement again owing to resumption of the shelling, which, among other things, could have endangered the lives of the monitors.

On 4 May, according to reports that have been confirmed by the SMM, four civilians were injured in Oleksandrivka (Donetsk region), including two seven-year-old girls and one aged ten. They all had to be taken to hospital. Finally, information came in this morning about the shelling of the settlement of Sakhanka, in the south of certain areas of the Donetsk region, as a result of which five people sustained injuries, including two young children (a boy and a girl).

The settlement of Syhnalne near Donetsk continues to be targeted by the Ukrainian military and has been subjected to repeated shelling. Over the past few weeks, the SMM has documented two casualties of the shelling there, including one civilian who was killed. On 5 May, as reported, further shelling of the settlement was registered, with five residential buildings suffering damage.

Aggressive actions calculated to escalate tensions and intimidate the civilian population of Donbas and the SMM monitors are, in our view, absolutely unacceptable.

We trust that the Mission will be able to duly clarify, in a prompt manner, all the facts concerning the aforementioned instances of shelling, including the direction of fire and the type of weapons used, and that it will reflect these in its reports. We call on the SMM to intensify its efforts to help protect the civilian population of Donbas against the consequences of the Ukrainian armed forces' aggressive actions. That is also important in terms of the OSCE's authority. As a significant preventive measure, the Mission should resume the practice of publishing thematic reports on civilian casualties.

The latest casualties are the result of the lack of progress within the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) in Minsk with regard to confirming commitment to the ceasefire regime and to the adoption of supporting measures. The authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk expressed their own willingness a long time ago, but the Ukrainian Government is still procrastinating and keeps setting out new conditions for the ceasefire.

On 5 May, President Volodymyr Zelenskyi signed a decree making changes to the composition of the negotiating team that represents Ukraine in the TCG. One of the leading positions on the team is now occupied by a familiar figure, namely, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Reintegration, Mr. Oleksiy Reznikov, who back in January publicly called for the Minsk agreements to be revised. All these changes are portrayed as a kind of beefing up of the Ukrainian Government's representation on the TCG. However, it is self-evident that the success of any negotiations hinges not on the "regalia" of those participating in them but on substantive work and the willingness to find acceptable solutions.

In particular, it is not clear how the staffing changes made by Ukraine are connected with the idea of setting up an advisory board within the TCG to discuss the political and legal aspects of the settlement together with the representatives of Donbas. We recall that this idea was put into writing in the minutes of the TCG meeting of 11 March 2020, which were signed by the Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine, Mr. Andriy Yermak, as well as by the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk. At the bottom of the minutes we also find the signature of the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine and in the TCG, Ms. Heidi Grau. However, subsequently the Ukrainian Government has in effect disavowed that document by refusing to ratify the text of a decision that had already been agreed on.

It is highly alarming that the Ukrainian authorities have again started trying not only to pull back from agreements involving the representatives of Donbas that had already been reached within the TCG, but, more generally, also to push the authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk out of the negotiation process. A statement made by Mr. Yermak on 4 May is most telling: he admitted that the current representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk had been, over the course of the whole six-year negotiation process in Minsk, "the sole representatives" of certain areas of Donbas, but immediately added that Ukraine "will never conduct negotiations" with them. Moreover, he announced certain criteria put forward by the Ukrainian Government, in connection with which he expected the representatives of Donbas in the TCG to be replaced by more amenable individuals. This gives rise to the legitimate question: with whom in that case were the representatives of the Ukrainian authorities dealing with in Minsk all those years as part of the negotiation process, with whom were they sitting round the negotiation table and agreeing on decisions? And why are such arguments being raised at precisely this juncture, when, as a result of the Ukrainian Government's inconsistent attitude, the whole negotiation process has effectively reached a deadlock? How should one

interpret these declarations? As a statement of intent to pull out of the process of negotiation with the authorities in Donbas envisaged by the Minsk agreements? There is surely no need to recall that the representatives of the republics proclaimed by the people of Donbas also added their signatures to the Minsk agreements – in particular, to the Minsk Package of Measures of 12 February 2015, which was endorsed by the United Nations Security Council.

It is not surprising that, during the videoconference of the foreign ministers of the Normandy Four countries held on 30 April, the status of virtually all the “tracks” of the settlement process for the crisis in Ukraine was found to be unsatisfactory. This also applies to the implementation of the “Paris package” of instructions from the “Normandy format” summit held on 9 December 2019: out of the various tasks it contains, the parties have managed to carry out only one (and even that only partly), namely, the exchange of detainees. Incidentally, the Working Group on Humanitarian Issues is pretty much the only TCG working group in which it has been possible to observe at least some progress lately. However, even there, as confirmed by the briefing given yesterday by the Humanitarian Working Group’s co-ordinator, Mr. Toni Frisch, the Ukrainian Government’s representatives are displaying a lack of political will to make further headway on a number of areas.

Against this backdrop, the state of affairs in the country as a whole is discouraging as well. The situation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church remains dire. Its clergy and congregations continue to be subjected to unprecedented pressure. Apart from the wave of arson attacks on churches and monasteries that swept through the country in April, the attempts to seize parishes by force continue unabated. For example, on 4 May, some forty radically minded individuals, many of whom were wearing balaclavas, tried to take over the Church of St. Michael the Archangel in the village of Zadubrivka in the Zastavna district of the Chernivtsi region. They beat up and tried to intimidate the peace-loving parishioners of that church. As a result, at least three parishioners had to be taken to hospital, one of them with a knife injury to the head. Despite this, the law enforcement officers who arrived on the scene did not arrest the instigators of the assault. We expect the SMM to monitor such incidents and reflect them in its reports. Additionally, it is essential to ensure that the Ukrainian authorities respond promptly to these outrages and investigate them properly.

It would seem, moreover, that the policy of concealing the truth about high-profile political crimes that was followed by the previous authorities of Ukraine has not changed despite the change of leadership in 2019. A recent interview with Volodymyr Parasyuk, an active participant in the February 2014 coup d’état in Kyiv, is very telling in that respect. He openly admitted to having committed a collective crime in that he and a group of accomplices opened fire on law enforcement officers in the Ukrainian capital. Furthermore, he explicitly mentioned the former Prosecutor General of Ukraine, Mr. Yuriy Lutsenko, who during his tenure helped them all to escape criminal responsibility for their actions and “hid the dossiers” containing the case files. The fact that Ukraine’s current law enforcement authorities have no questions to ask of Mr. Parasyuk is most telling, too. It appears that the new Ukrainian Government is at present not interested either in establishing the truth about the events that occurred on the Maidan, accompanied as they were by mass shootings of people.

A further tragedy occurred six years ago, namely, the monstrous crime of 2 May 2014 at the Trade Union House in Odessa. Instead of honouring the memory of those killed as a result of the rioting by radicals acting in the name of Ukrainian national exclusivity, the Ukrainian Government’s diplomats have resorted to deceitful demagoguery, unleashing a veritable campaign to shift the responsibility for that violence on to Russia. We shall not comment on these clearly sick fantasies. Suffice it to state the facts: to this day that crime has still not been investigated properly, despite the copious audiovisual evidence and numerous eyewitness testimonies that incriminate those radicals. No one has been brought to justice. Surely there is no need to point out that the low-grade politicking being resorted to in order to deflect attention from the

negligence of the Ukrainian executive and law enforcement authorities with regard to investigating the tragic events of Odessa can in no way make up for the grief and loss suffered by the victims' families and friends or for their need to find out the truth about those events?

Mr. Chairperson,

Our meeting is taking place on the eve of the celebrations to mark the 75th anniversary of victory in the Second World War. This date is an important opportunity to reflect on the lessons of history, particularly with regard to not allowing a renaissance of hate ideology based on notions of national supremacy. Unfortunately, the current reality in Ukraine is characterized by numerous manifestations of aggressive nationalism and neo-Nazism. Yet, history bears testimony to the fact that only by renouncing radical nationalism and building a national community on the basis of equal respect for the rights and interests of all its social and ethnic groups is it possible to attain sustainable peace and social harmony. We hope that the Ukrainian leadership will choose precisely that path for its country's development.

Thank you for your attention.