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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1176th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

15 February 2018

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

Mr. Chairperson,

The situation in Ukraine is deteriorating. Over the past week, the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) recorded over 4,000 violations of the ceasefire regime. The Ukrainian armed forces are once again using multiple-launch rocket systems (MLRS) at the line of contact. On 8 February, monitors recorded 60 rounds of fire from Grad MLRS in Svitlodarsk and around 180 strikes in the vicinity of Debaltseve. Indiscriminate shelling of towns and villages by the Ukrainian armed forces continues. On 7 February, the SMM confirmed damage to a five-storey apartment building in Dokuchaievsk as a result of shelling.

During the week, in violation of the Minsk Package of Measures, the SMM discovered 57 units of weaponry belonging to the Ukrainian armed forces, including 8 MLRS in Topolyne, 14 howitzers in Vodiane, 13 self-propelled howitzers in Oleksandropil, 12 anti-tank guns in Sievierodonetsk, 4 howitzers in Bila Hora, 4 anti-tank guns in Mariupol, an anti-tank gun in Oleksandro-Kalynove and a surface-to-air missile system in Teple. A record amount of equipment – over 400 units – was missing from security forces' storage sites. It is not difficult to guess where these weapons have gone.

The fact that the Ukrainian armed forces fired at SMM unmanned aerial vehicles on 6 February in Mykhailivka and on 10 February in Klishchiivka, as well as the closure of Shchastia, Zolote and Stanytsia Luhanska to the monitors on the pretext of mine hazards, refute the claims that it is allegedly the militia who are primarily responsible for blocking the monitors' work.

The Ukrainian Government is not only blocking the disengagement of forces and hardware in Stanytsia Luhanska, although there have been no violations of the ceasefire regime there since 25 December, but is also engaging in a remilitarization of other areas where there has been disengagement. The SMM and local residents confirmed that Ukrainian

military personnel had set up camp in Katerynivka again – inside the Zolote disengagement area.

The Ukrainian armed forces have set up checkpoints and deployed soldiers in Novooleksandrivka, their positions dangerously close to those of the militia. On 12 February, a Ukrainian team attempted unsuccessfully to seize new positions and crossed the line of contact near the village of Zholobok.

The situation is exacerbated by the Ukrainian leadership's claims about the "successes" of the punitive army in Donbas. On 12 February, the Secretary of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine, Oleksandr Turchynov, said in an interview with Hromadske TV that in 2016 and 2017 the Ukrainian armed forces pushed the front line forward by ten kilometres or more. In his words, the Ukrainian soldiers improved their positions, and today there are no forces in the occupied territory that could change the demarcation line that exists today. We trust that the SMM in accordance with its mandate will verify this statement regarding the situation in the security zone in Donbas and will provide an appropriate assessment. It appears that Mr. Turchynov is preparing public opinion for a fresh escalation of tension in Donbas, which the Ukrainian Government intends to provoke in the very near future.

The Ukrainian armed forces' "creeping offensive" has repeatedly led to a large-scale escalation of tension. Following the security forces' seizure of Shyrokyne in February 2016, in violation of the commitments to demilitarize this village, and the seizure of the Avdiivka industrial zone in March 2016, new hotspots appeared on the map of Donbas. The advance of Ukrainian armed forces' forward positions towards Olenivka ended in tragedy in April 2016, when several civilians were killed or injured as a result of shelling by the Ukrainian armed forces. A serious escalation of tension was provoked by the Ukrainian armed forces' attack on the village of Zholobok in June 2017 and the seizure of the settlements of Travneve (Metallist) and Hladosove in November 2017.

Detailed information on the dangerous massing of Ukrainian forces and weaponry was presented by representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk yesterday at the meeting of the Trilateral Contact Group in Minsk.

In that connection, there has still been no progress in discussing the prospects for the implementation of the political points of the Package of Measures.

On the contrary, the law on the so-called reintegration of Donbas in fact undermines the Minsk agreements and sets the stage for a military operation. The Ukrainian security forces are making intensive preparations for large-scale combat activities. The massing of forces and hardware at the line of contact has taken on threatening proportions.

Radical nationalist groups – the main agitators for a scenario involving the use of force – have become more active. They are not only holding torchlit marches and rallies, but also committing crimes with impunity and exerting pressure on the authorities.

On 4 February, nationalists attempted to set fire to the Hungarian cultural centre in Uzhgorod. On 5 February, radicals from the National Corps, Svoboda, Right Sector and the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists demonstrated outside the Polish consulates in Odessa and Lviv. Attempts to exert influence on the authorities are intensifying. On 9 February,

accomplices of those accused of murdering the journalist Oles Buzina held a demonstration in support of the criminals.

Against this background, persecution of journalists continues, and there is strong pressure from the authorities and nationalists on the media. The chief editor of the Strana.ua publication Igor Guzhva was forced to seek asylum in Austria. The Mirotvorets website, where journalists are listed among the enemies of the people, operates as before.

The Vesti media premises in Kyiv were raided on 8 February. Ukrainian security forces blocked off the company's office, conducted unlawful searches and prevented journalists from going to work. Vesti's work is now carried out remotely, and the next issue of the newspaper is in doubt. The Ukrainian Government is endeavouring to clamp down on opposition media sources. This is a blatant act of violence against freedom of speech. We demand an immediate response from the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media.

We trust that in accordance with its mandate the SMM will carefully study and report in detail on the development of the situation regarding these media premises. We believe that in view of all of the incidents since 2014 the SMM should provide a detailed thematic report on freedom of expression and access to information in Ukraine.

Harassment of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has taken on threatening proportions. On 25 January, C14 and Sokol nationalists took down information panels outside the Desyatynna Monastery in Kyiv. During the night, radicals attempted to set fire to the church, and then organized demonstrations calling for the removal of the chapel. Priests and parishioners have received threats. The desecration and seizure of churches by extremists and violence towards members of the clergy and worshippers are accompanied by attempts on the part of the authorities to strengthen their right to interfere legally in church affairs. The Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada is considering a number of draft laws, which are directed not only against the church but also against the population. Their adoption could result in discrimination, violation of freedom of conscience and belief, religious discord and bloodshed for religious reasons.

Following the adoption by the Verkhovna Rada of the law on education in September 2017, almost half of the country's population have suffered restrictions in their right to receive education in their native language. The authorities are once again inflaming the situation and in many ways reviving the reasons that gave rise to the conflict in the first place. The adoption of that law prevents the parties to the internal conflict in Ukraine from achieving any kind of rapprochement and makes the prospects of reaching a final settlement less likely. There is a marked unwillingness on the part of the Ukrainian Government to honour its commitments under Point 11 of the Minsk Package of Measures of 12 February 2015, which provides for the adoption of permanent legislation on the special status of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions with account taken of their right to linguistic self-determination. There are no signs that the Council of Europe Venice Commission's recommendations on the modification of that law are being implemented. On the contrary, further steps are being taken to restrict the use of the Russian language.

A further sign of escalation was the expulsion from Ukraine on 12 February of Mikheil Saakashvili – a well-known international swindler and war criminal. This drew an immediate response from the radicals and may be used to unleash a new wave of instability. Mr. Saakashvili's supporters urged people to demonstrate outside the State administration

buildings in the regions and set up roadblocks on the Kyiv to Lviv highway. The SMM observed a rally of Mr. Saakashvili's supporters in Kyiv on 12 February, at which Donbas radical battalion volunteers in balaclavas were to be seen.

We recall that there is a route to peace in Ukraine. It lies in direct dialogue between the Ukrainian Government, Donetsk and Luhansk, and strict implementation of the Minsk agreements. The Package of Measures endorsed by the United Nations Security Council remains relevant in its entirety. This is not the Ukrainian Government's capitulation but an opportunity to preserve Ukraine's territorial integrity within its current borders and achieve reconciliation and harmony within society.

Thank you for your attention.