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PC.DEL/1409/19
13 December 2019

ENGLISH
Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1252nd MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

12 December 2019

**In response to the reports by the Special Representative of the OSCE
Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine and in the Trilateral Contact Group,
Ambassador Martin Sajdik, and the Chief Monitor of the OSCE
Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, Ambassador Yaşar Halit Çevik**

Mr. Chairperson,

We welcome the distinguished Ambassadors Martin Sajdik and Yaşar Halit Çevik and thank them for the reports they have presented, which illustrate the continuing difficult situation in Ukraine. Despite the keen public demand for peace in Donbas, its inhabitants have for more than five and half years remained hostages to the lack of political will on the part of the Ukrainian Government to reach a settlement on the basis of dialogue with the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk. The recent efforts in the “Normandy format” were also aimed at unblocking this unsatisfactory situation.

On 9 December, the leaders of France, Germany and Russia held useful discussions with the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyi, in Paris. As a result, a number of clear signals were sent regarding the need for further de-escalation and a political settlement. The goal is to establish lasting peace in eastern Ukraine. At the same time, even these constructive intentions were accompanied by very contradictory statements by the Ukrainian leadership – both before and after the summit – regarding their objection to certain provisions of the Minsk Package of Measures of 12 February 2015. Furthermore, according to the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), violations of the ceasefire regime were recorded on the day of the summit in both the Donetsk and the Luhansk regions.

Reaffirmation of its participants’ commitment to securing full implementation of the Minsk agreements was the key outcome of the “Normandy” meeting. It underscored the need to step up the work of the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) in Minsk, within the framework of which the parties – the Ukrainian Government and the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk – have an opportunity to discuss directly all the aspects of a settlement. The Package of Measures endorsed by United Nations Security Council resolution 2202 and recognized by the international community as the only framework for resolving the crisis in Ukraine makes direct provision for such dialogue.

The enshrining in law of the special status of Donbas on a permanent basis is the platform for a political settlement. The need to reach agreement with the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk in the

TCG on all the related legal aspects – as stipulated in the Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements – was reaffirmed at the summit in Paris. Today the Verkhovna Rada extended the law on special status, which has still not entered into force, for one year until 31 December 2020. At the same time, in accordance with the Package of Measures, Donbas should be guaranteed special status by law on a permanent basis. This should also include the relevant amendments to the Constitution. We also expect the “Steinmeier formula” on the procedure for the entry into force of the special status to be enshrined in Ukrainian legislation as soon as possible.

With the aim of synchronizing the efforts to achieve a settlement in the political and security sphere, the TCG has the task of immediately stabilizing the situation at the line of contact. This includes measures to support the ceasefire regime, the need to relaunch agreements on demining activities, and instructions to agree on and carry out disengagement within the next three months in additional areas, which the parties identify during direct consultations. As can be seen from the SMM’s reports, there are no active hostilities in Donbas, however “complete silence” has still not been established. Over the past week alone, the number of ceasefire violations totalled several thousand. Shelling continues in the vicinity of settlements. We stress the need to publish orders for a ceasefire, to introduce disciplinary measures for those who violate the ceasefire and to prohibit sabotage and the deployment of weapons and military positions near residential areas.

In these conditions, there is a need for close monitoring by the SMM of the situation both near the line of contact and behind the lines. We expect balanced monitoring on both sides of the line of contact, including the use of technical means. Military activity, rotation and regrouping of the Ukrainian armed forces, which often take place far away from the line of contact, should not escape the Mission’s attention. We express our support for the SMM Chief Monitor, Mr. Çevik, and all the staff working in very difficult conditions.

We noted the thematic report issued by the Mission at the start of December on the impact on civilians of mines and unexploded ordnance. An analysis of the composite data bears witness to the unsatisfactory implementation of the agreements on demining along the entire line of contact, except only for the disengagement areas in Stanytsia Luhanska, Petrivske and Zolote, where careful demining followed the actual disengagement. In that connection, the call by the Normandy Four for the development and implementation of an updated demining plan on the basis of the existing TCG decisions is especially relevant. We expect the SMM to publish systematic data on other casualties too, including a thematic report on the casualties of shelling and the destruction of civilian infrastructure.

The work of the TCG humanitarian working group received important impetus from the “Normandy format”. In these conditions, the Ukrainian Government and the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk are called upon to reach agreements and to carry out an exchange according to the principle of “all identified for all identified” before the new year. I would remind you that the last exchange of people connected with the events in Donbas took place almost two years ago on 27 December 2017. The work to verify the list of detainees should be accelerated. The task of legal clearance and amnesty for those who are subject to such an exchange also remains relevant. The sorry examples of how the Ukrainian Government first exchanges people and then puts them back on the wanted list do not help to create an atmosphere of trust between the parties.

The opening of new checkpoints at the line of contact is an important humanitarian measure that will improve the situation of the civilian population. We look forward to the relevant agreements being reached between the Ukrainian Government and the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk in the TCG at its forthcoming meetings in the wake of the Normandy Four’s guidelines.

Against this background, instead of solving the deep socio-political contradictions brought about by the coup d'état in 2014, the current Ukrainian authorities continue to intensify them.

Mention might be made of the findings of the experts of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe set out in the conclusion of 9 December 2019, No. 960/2019 (Opinion No. 960/2019), on the Ukrainian law on the State language, a number of whose provisions already entered into force this year. The experts recognized the basic discriminatory nature of the law and argued that the Ukrainian Government's language policy could become a source of inter-ethnic tensions. They recommended that the authorities bring the law into line with Ukraine's human rights obligations.

The encouragement by the Ukrainian State authorities of manifestations of aggressive nationalism and neo-Nazism warrants close attention. Recent examples include the adoption in early December by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine of Decision No. 2364 on the celebration of notable dates and anniversaries in 2020. The document proposes commemoration at the national level of the anniversaries of Ukrainian nationalists who brought dishonour on themselves by collaborating with the Nazis during the Second World War – Volodymyr Kubiyovych, Vasyl Levkovych, Ulas Samchuk, Vasyl Sydor and others. The Israeli embassy in Ukraine also expressed its concern at the glorification of such controversial figures. We repeat our position of principle: ignoring the rampant radical nationalism in Ukraine could lead to the most regrettable consequences.

In these conditions, the dialogue between the Ukrainian leadership and Donbas is complicated, but important, possible and necessary. We urge that the parties focus all their efforts on facilitating direct dialogue between the Ukrainian Government and the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk with a view to implementing the provisions of the Package of Measures in full and in a co-ordinated manner as soon as possible. This will help to normalize the situation across the country. The TCG and its working groups, which will meet again in Minsk on 18 December, have a particular responsibility for achieving agreements in line with the signals from the "Normandy format".

In conclusion, we should like to express our sincere gratitude to the distinguished Ambassador Sajdik for his energetic efforts and his important personal contribution towards facilitating a resolution of the crisis in Ukraine. For more than four and a half years he has co-ordinated the main negotiation platforms for consultations between the representatives of the Ukrainian Government and certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. We hope that the concluding meeting of the TCG this year under his leadership will give additional impetus to the entire settlement process.

We welcome the appointment of Ms. Heidi Grau as the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine and in the Trilateral Contact Group and wish her every success in this very responsible work.

Thank you for your attention.