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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1256th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

23 January 2020

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

Mr. Chairperson,

On 20 and 21 January, the Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE, Prime Minister of Albania Edi Rama, visited Ukraine, including Donbas. We believe it is extremely important to send clear signals to the Ukrainian leadership regarding the need for the Minsk agreements to be implemented as quickly as possible and also for the Ukrainian Government to fulfil its OSCE commitments. We regret that the Chairperson-in-Office failed to take up the invitation from the representatives of certain areas of Donbas and visit the environs of Donetsk and Luhansk on the other side of the line of contact so as to see with his own eyes the humanitarian consequences of the Ukrainian Government's military operation in the region.

The ceasefire regime in Donbas is not being fully respected. Over the past week, the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) recorded over 5,000 violations. The movement of Ukrainian offensive military equipment is not helping to reduce tensions. For example, the SMM reported having spotted on 16 January 14 large-calibre multiple-launch rocket systems – eight 220 mm BM-27 Uragan systems and six 300 mm BM-30 Smerch systems – at weapons storage sites close to where the Ukrainian Government's military operation is taking place in the Donetsk region.

It would appear that the Ukrainian Government is not ruling out a full-scale intensification of hostilities in Donbas. This has been confirmed by the statements heard from the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine regarding the readiness to liberate the region by force, and by the military preparations of the Ukrainian armed forces. Towards the end of last year, the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence concluded a contract with the Pentagon for the delivery of another consignment of Javelin missile systems from the United States of America. This time, the military equipment is being purchased directly with funds from the Ukrainian budget. Such deliveries are nothing but an investment in maintaining military tension.

The recent interview given by the Ukrainian Minister of Defence, Andriy Zagorodnyuk, to the Interfax-Ukraine news agency, in which he spoke openly against de-escalation, is quite telling. The Minister categorically stated that the Ukrainian Government was against the disengagement of forces and hardware along the entire line of contact and said that the militia should disarm unilaterally. At the same time, the situation in Stanytsia Luhanska, Zolote and Petrivske shows that the implementation of the disengagement agreement in 2019 contributed to a significant reduction in ceasefire violations in these pilot areas and to an

almost complete cessation of violations in the case of Stanytsia Luhanska. Against this background, Mr. Zagorodnyuk's comments merely confirm that the Ukrainian Government is not so much focused on a comprehensive settlement of the crisis as on developing ways to establish control over Donbas.

The ongoing armed confrontation in eastern Ukraine is causing fresh casualties among the civilian population, not only as a result of shelling. Mines and explosive ordnance pose a serious danger. The SMM has reported four civilian casualties since the beginning of 2020. Under these conditions, it is important for the parties – the Ukrainian Government, Donetsk and Luhansk – to carry out without delay the instructions issued at the Normandy Four summit in Paris on 9 December 2019 regarding the need to implement all the necessary ceasefire support measures, develop and implement an updated demining plan, and agree on new disengagement areas.

Unfortunately, the meeting of the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) in Minsk on 16 January has not yet resulted in significant progress. We hope that at the second TCG meeting this year on 29 January, chaired by Ms. Heidi Grau, Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine and in the Trilateral Contact Group, the parties will be able to reach acceptable solutions and specific agreements.

We must not forget about the need for simultaneous progress on the political track of the settlement, which was previously also entrusted to the parties by the “Normandy format”. So far, the Ukrainian Government has not done its homework in terms of setting in stone the law on the special status of Donbas and reflecting it in the Constitution. The mechanism for its enactment under the “Steinmeier formula” is also in limbo: after almost four months since its approval by the Ukrainian representatives, the prospects for the implementation of the formula in Ukrainian legislation are still vague. There has been no progress on an amnesty for those involved in the events in Donbas, which would make it possible to implement the agreement on the exchange of detained persons according to the principle of “all for all”. It goes without saying that the Ukrainian Government should reach agreement with the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk in the TCG on all the legal aspects connected with such political steps.

Mr. Chairperson,

The crisis in Ukraine is not limited to the difficult situation in Donbas, which, incidentally, is also something that the SMM should remember. The screws continue to be tightened in the linguistic and educational spheres.

The assault on freedom of speech in Ukraine has become systemic. The draft law on the media that was submitted by deputies belonging to the Servant of the People ruling party is being considered in the Verkhovna Rada. Under the slogan of fighting to ensure the reliability of information, they want to establish *de facto* censorship in the country. It is proposed that the Ukrainian media – television, radio, the press and Internet resources – should relay the authorities' biased assessments of historical and current events. A wide range of repressive instruments are being used against dissident journalists, from the blocking of publications to imprisonment.

A draft law on countering disinformation is coming to fruition in the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports. The principles are the same, namely punishment in the form of fines and prison sentences (between two and seven years) for publishing information that the authorities consider unreliable. In that connection, under the threat of dismissal, journalists will be required to take some kind of test to confirm their “trustworthiness”.

The fact is that censorship has been going on for a long time now. The authorities are increasing pressure on undesirable television channels. Recent examples include the Nash television channel being

fined for showing an interview with the former Prime Minister of Ukraine, Mykola Azarov, the ordering of unscheduled inspections of ZIK and 112-Ukraine, and also attempts to deprive NewsOne of its licence. We urge the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Mr. Harlem Désir, to work more closely with the Ukrainian Government on these matters.

Glorification of aggressive nationalism and neo-Nazism continues, as we already discussed in detail at the last meeting of the Permanent Council. The incident on 19 January on Mykhailivska Square in Kyiv, where young people – many of them wearing masks – attacked peaceful civilians who were calling for attacks by radicals to be investigated and an end to State support for nationalist movements, is significant.

At virtually the same time as an interview with President Volodymyr Zelenskyi appeared in the *Times of Israel*, in which he spoke about the record low level of anti-Semitism in Ukraine, the Israeli ambassador to Ukraine, Joel Leon, expressed his concern about the attack by vandals on the monument to the victims of the Holocaust erected in Kryvyi Rih, the home town of the Ukrainian President.

The SMM and the relevant OSCE structures should respond appropriately to all these challenges.

Thank you for your attention.