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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
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AT THE 1271st MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

11 June 2020

On the US dual-use biological laboratories in Georgia and Ukraine

Mr. Chairperson,

The spread of the coronavirus infection has made public health protection one of the priorities for most States. Predictably, this issue occupies a central place on many multilateral platforms. We are all asking how we can deal with the consequences of the current pandemic and how we can prevent such epidemiological disasters in the future.

In that connection, we should like to draw attention to the activity of the dual-use bio-epidemiological laboratories established by the United States of America in the OSCE area. In recent years, we have regularly raised the issue of foreign military and biological activity in Georgia, primarily at the Richard Lugar Center in the village of Alekseevka near Tbilisi. More than ten similar objects also operate in Ukraine. The press has written a lot about the involvement of the US company Black & Veatch Special Projects Corp. in their creation and modernization. We have repeatedly drawn attention to the non-transparent functioning of these institutions – particularly those over which the Ukrainian and Georgian authorities are allowed only partial control.

To judge by leaks in the media, Georgian and Ukrainian biological laboratories are conducting secret experiments with particularly dangerous pathogens, including plague and haemorrhagic fever agents, under the guise of fighting infectious diseases. Particular attention is being paid to researching mutant forms, modifying viruses and increasing their contagiousness (transmissibility). Reports of trials with dubious preparations that US military medical personnel have been conducting with Georgian subjects and also the collection of human biomaterial for “research purposes” give cause for alarm.

For example, in Ukraine by a strange coincidence in early 2016 an outbreak of swine flu (A/H1N1) was recorded in Donbas, as a result of which, according to the most conservative estimates, at least 12 people died in certain areas of the Donetsk region. In addition, according to the Ukrainian Ministry of Health, about 60 people died on the other side of the line of contact. At the same time, the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence reported that at least 360 Ukrainian military personnel sought medical treatment in January 2016 after displaying the relevant symptoms. Many independent Ukrainian researchers connected this sudden outbreak of swine flu with the activities of the central reference laboratory in the village of Shelkostantsiya in the Kharkiv region.

It is known that these biological laboratories are constructed, financed and operated with the participation of the US Department of Defense's Defense Threat Reduction Agency, the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, the US Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases and other medical departments reporting to the Pentagon.

The conduct of experiments by foreign military biologists in the Russian border area raises our legitimate concerns, particularly in the context of the implementation of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction, not least in view of the fact that for two decades the United States has been blocking efforts to develop and adopt a legally binding Protocol to the Convention with an effective verification mechanism.

Moreover, we see this as a failure by the United States to meet its commitments in the field of research and development in biotechnology as stipulated in particular in the Concluding Document of the Vienna Meeting of the CSCE in 1986.

We should like to ask our US colleagues and their foreign collaborators in questionable biomedical experiments: have the hundreds of thousands of victims of the coronavirus pandemic not convincingly demonstrated the fragility and interdependence of our living space? We should also like to ask when the use of territories of post-Soviet republics as natural testing grounds will stop.

In short, there are a lot of questions, but the authorities in Washington, let alone those in Kyiv or Tbilisi, are in no hurry to answer them. Instead of explanations about the aims of the US military and biological activities in the States bordering our country, we frequently hear mere exercises in rhetoric about the supposedly "strictly humanitarian background" to the Pentagon projects. Effectively, we are being asked to take them at their word. We should like to see a more responsible and transparent approach by the United States in such a sensitive and dangerous field. We firmly believe that we all have the right to know what is really "cooking" in the US biological laboratories. Moreover, the presence of US military medical and biological infrastructure facilities in a number of OSCE participating States that are completely beyond the control of national authorities adds instability to an already difficult security situation in the Organization's area of responsibility.

Thank you for your attention.