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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,  
AT THE 1304th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

4 March 2021

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

Madam Chairperson,

There is still no progress in the settlement of the crisis in Ukraine. In accordance with the Minsk Package of Measures of 12 February 2015, the country's authorities undertook to resolve the issues of achieving peace in dialogue with the representatives of Donbas. But, in that regard, they stubbornly avoid direct and effective contact with them, continuing to call into question the substance of the Minsk agreements and sabotage their implementation. This was evident once again during the meetings of the Minsk-based Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) and its working groups on 2 and 3 March, at which the Ukrainian Government's negotiators again raised the issue of the status of the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk. And this is almost a year after the Ukrainian Government's written confirmation of its acceptance of their authority, recorded in the minutes of the TCG meeting of 11 March 2020.

We see a chronic absence of political will in Kyiv to pursue a peaceful settlement on the basis of the Minsk agreements, and there are repeated demands to change the sequence of steps set out in the Package of Measures. At almost every meeting of the Permanent Council, we quote Ukrainian officials attesting to this. In these circumstances, the assurances by the representatives of Ukraine to the OSCE regarding the Ukrainian Government's commitment to implementing the Minsk agreements sound unconvincing.

Let me cite one of the recent comments made by the head of the Ukrainian delegation to the TCG negotiations, Leonid Kravchuk, who said the following in an interview with Deutsche Welle on 25 February: "Without a change in the basic conceptual positions of the Minsk and Normandy formats, we will be unable to make any headway in the war in Donbas. Take, for example, the Package of Measures endorsed by the United Nations Security Council. In paragraph 9 of that document, it is written: first elections, then security and borders. [...] There are many such points and they need to be changed." The emphasis here is highly significant. As Mr. Kravchuk's words suggest, the Ukrainian Government is preoccupied with how to make "headway in the war in Donbas", and not at all with progress in a comprehensive political settlement of the conflict in the east of Ukraine. It not surprising that, against this backdrop, there is no momentum in resolving the political, socio-economic and humanitarian aspects of a settlement.

We can reasonably conclude that the Ukrainian Government is deliberately stalling a settlement and using the sluggish and ineffective negotiation process in the TCG as a “breathing space” to regroup its forces and shore up its military capacity near the line of contact. For example, according to the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), the Ukrainian armed forces continue to make active use of railway hubs in Donbas to transport equipment and weapons. Over the past two weeks, the Mission has recorded over 230 Ukrainian tanks and weapons, including large-calibre artillery, outside the designated storage sites – mostly at the railway stations in Kostiantynivka, Pokrovsk, Druzhkivka, Sloviansk and Rubizhne. We urge the SMM to keep an eye on further movements of these weapons and to use its early warning capabilities to identify places where weapons are being amassed and areas of potential escalation of military tension.

Also according to the SMM, the use of weapons, including heavy weapons, has resumed on the territory near the Donetsk settlement of Syhnalne, which is located close to the Olenivka checkpoint. At the beginning of February, five residential buildings in Syhnalne were damaged by mortar fire – analysis of several craters confirmed that the shelling came from a westerly direction (SMM reports dated 2 and 6 February). On 21 February, monitors spotted fresh impact craters there from 122 mm mortar rounds (report dated 25 February). According to reports pending confirmation by the SMM, shelling near Olenivka continued on 24 and 25 February. On 1 March, the Mission’s monitors at that checkpoint also recorded shell explosions (spot report dated 1 March). As can be seen from the SMM reports, the deterioration of the security situation near Olenivka not only had an impact on the monitors’ freedom of movement, but also affected the delivery of international humanitarian cargo through that checkpoint. It was required to take a different route and crossed the line of contact in the Luhansk region.

The outcome of the meeting of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine (NSDC) on 19 February also gives rise to legitimate concerns that the Ukrainian Government is considering new military ventures in Donbas. For example, NSDC Secretary Oleksiy Danilov confirmed at a press conference that, on President Zelenskyy’s instructions, the Council would review the so-called five secret scenarios for Donbas that were drawn up back in December 2019. Following the announced plans, he added that, from now on, the Ukrainian military could make “instant decisions” as regards opening fire in Donbas. This directly contravenes the measures in support of the ceasefire regime agreed with the representatives of the Ukrainian Government and Donbas within the TCG on 22 July 2020. Addressing Parliament on 22 February, the Prime Minister of Ukraine, Denys Shmyhal, also confirmed the new approach. He reported that there would be no disciplinary sanctions against Ukrainian soldiers for opening fire.

It is remarkable that neither of these senior officials mentioned the need to apply the co-ordination mechanism, provided for by the measures to strengthen the ceasefire, for responding to ceasefire violations. As stipulated in these measures, the mechanism should function “through the facilitation of the Joint Centre for Control and Co-ordination (JCCC) in its current form”. However, the Ukrainian Government stubbornly refuses to co-operate effectively with the members of the Donetsk and Luhansk militia currently making up the JCCC on the other side of the line of contact.

Lastly, the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Ruslan Khomchak, confirmed at a press conference on 22 February that a scenario for an offensive in Donbas was being prepared. Let me quote his words: “As [part of preparations for] an offensive scenario, last year we began preparations in all our military units for offensive operations in urbanized areas.” However, he acknowledged that there were no signs at present of “offensive groupings being formed” on the other side of the line of contact.

In these circumstances, the desire of a number of countries to support the “war party” in Kyiv by providing military aid is a cause for growing concern. We have taken note of the information on the recently announced decision to allocate a new military aid package from the Department of Defense of the United

States of America totalling 125 million US dollars. We emphasize once more: such demonstrative actions against the backdrop of bellicose statements by Ukrainian officials, coupled with the absence of any reaction to the Ukrainian Government's sabotage of the Minsk agreements, impose a serious share of responsibility on the sponsors of the current Ukrainian authorities for the continuing armed violence and suffering of the civilian population of Donbas.

Madam Chairperson,

Over the past few weeks, Ukraine has been remembering the events of February 2014 in the streets of Kyiv that led to the anti-constitutional change of power in the country. The reality is that attempts by the so-called "Maidan victors" to consolidate their one-sided interpretation of what happened are still not unanimously accepted by Ukrainian society, which to this day has received no answer to the question of who was behind the bloody killings of protesters and law enforcement officers. These crimes have so far still not been investigated, and the perpetrators continue to escape punishment. It is not surprising that the results of opinion polls conducted in December, January and February by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, the Ukrainian Sociological Group and Rating Group Ukraine indicate that over 70 per cent of Ukraine's inhabitants are convinced that the country is heading in the wrong direction. Against this backdrop, the hackneyed myth about some kind of external "aggression" and "occupation" continues to be imposed on society. It is intended to divert attention from the domestic problems caused by the coup d'état in February 2014, which was carried out with the active support of the United States and a number of European Union countries.

Nowadays, dissent is brutally suppressed in Ukraine. Those who dare express alternative points of view on the economy, politics and international relations are branded as the "aggressor's accomplices" or accused of treason and of having links to certain "terrorist structures". In some ways even surpassing their odious predecessors, the current Ukrainian authorities have launched a massive campaign of politically motivated repression. They are actively following the practice of imposing sanctions on their own citizens. This is in effect an instrument of extrajudicial punishment against the undesirables, stripping dissenters of their rights outside the framework of a lawful investigation and the possibility of appropriate defence within the formal legal procedures in force in the State. It seems that Ukraine has completely forgotten about the principle of the rule of law, to say nothing of the country's failure to comply with its human rights obligations.

The attempt to block the work of independent media is also in a similar vein. The removal from the airwaves of three major nationwide television news channels – 112 Ukraine, NewsOne and ZIK – without a court decision, and on the basis of a decree by President Zelenskyy, was followed by another act restricting freedom of the media. On 26 February, without any presidential decree, court ruling or decision by the responsible regulatory body, access to the broadcasting frequencies of the First Independent television channel, established by the journalistic community, was cut off. In addition, the television channels have been targeted by aggressive nationalists, as evidenced by the increased picketing of their offices recorded by the SMM over the past month.

The Internet has not escaped censorship either. On 25 February, a ruling by a Kyiv district court blocked access across the country to 426 websites, including news portals, thematic forums and a number of media resources hosted in the domain zones of Ukraine, Russia, Germany, Italy and Israel.

The silence on the part of Ukraine's external "minders" about the lawlessness in the country, and at times their outright pandering to it as well, is surprising. The statements by the US Embassy to Ukraine, which not only failed to condemn but also endorsed the extrajudicial actions of the Ukrainian leadership against its political opponents and non-State media, are telling. Even today, all the participants in the

discussion have preferred to remain shamefacedly silent on these matters. We should like to ask our esteemed colleagues – is this how you understand freedom of speech and freedom of the press?

We urge the OSCE participating States and all the Organization's specialist bodies to pay close attention to the aforementioned alarming trends. The lack of a proper response to the blatant violations of commitments only encourages the Ukrainian authorities to deviate further from our Organization's principles.

Thank you for your attention.