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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE
1316th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

27 May 2021

**On the deteriorating situation in Ukraine and the continued non-implementation by the
Ukrainian authorities of the Minsk agreements**

Madam Chairperson,

The Ukrainian authorities, relying on the support of their foreign “minders”, carry on shirking substantive work on implementation of the Minsk agreements. Despite the efforts of the foreign policy advisers to the leaders of the “Normandy format” countries, whose latest round of contacts took place on 26 May, the Ukrainian Government continues to demonstrate a lack of political will to achieve a peaceful settlement of the conflict not in words but in deeds.

In these circumstances, the situation in eastern Ukraine is deteriorating. The number of ceasefire violations is on the rise. In its recent reports, the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) has reported further casualties due to shelling. Even though this was done with a significant delay, the information presented there must not be ignored. In addition to reflecting the irreparable losses and massive suffering of the civilian population inflicted on the residents of Donbas by the ongoing punitive operation of the Ukrainian authorities to suppress dissent, the data in the SMM reports also graphically illustrate who the Ukrainian armed forces and the Ukrainian nationalists’ paramilitary units are actually at war with.

Thus, the SMM monitors confirmed that, on 8 May, an 81-year-old pensioner and resident of the western outskirts of Donetsk was killed as a result of shelling. Another elderly man there suffered an injury to his head on 22 April. A 12-year-old child was injured by the blast wave from a shell that exploded on 29 April near the windows of an apartment in the north of Donetsk.

Additionally, there were reports of the death of a further civilian in Donetsk on 24 May and of damage to overhead power lines that left around 200 residential buildings in the western part of the city without electricity. We expect the Mission to study these facts and reflect them in its reports. We call on the SMM to develop contacts with representatives of the local authorities in certain areas of Donbas in accordance with paragraph 3 of its mandate. This is essential in order to ensure that events are covered promptly, accurately and objectively in its reports.

The ceasefire-strengthening measures are demonstratively not being complied with. The Ukrainian Government refuses to liaise with the authorities in Donbas on the parameters for monitoring the ceasefire

and responding to violations with the involvement of a co-ordination mechanism, as stipulated by the agreed measures of 22 July 2020.

Given the continued shelling, it is impossible to take appropriate demining action. The relevant plan has got “stuck” in the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG), where the Ukrainian representatives stubbornly avoid direct dialogue with the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk. Against this backdrop, the sad statistics on civilian casualties caused by blast injuries pile up. Thus, the SMM reported on the death of a 17-year-old youth on 6 April as the result of a mine explosion in Slovianoserbsk. On that same day, a female pensioner in Zaitseve was injured by the detonation of an unidentified explosive object. On 15 April, a local resident was injured in Kreminna as a result of a similar detonation.

Backed by foreign “minders”, efforts to militarize Ukraine continue, which merely serves to stoke the aggressive aspirations of those who support a solution by force to the so-called “Donbas problem”. The political sponsors of the current Ukrainian authorities are effectively giving the green light for war crimes to be committed in eastern Ukraine; they are training and drilling the Ukrainian military and security forces, allocating military aid, and pumping weapons and ammunition into the country. All these signs of encouragement are clearly being registered in Kyiv, where they continue with large-scale preparations for the conduct of further military operations – that is, with preparations, it should be stressed, not for a comprehensive political settlement but for prolonging the armed phase of the conflict.

Since 2014 the numerical strength of the Ukrainian armed forces has increased from 140,000 to 246,500 military personnel, while military spending has more than quadrupled (from 2.2 billion US dollars in 2014 to 9.2 billion US dollars in 2021). Yet even this has proven too little for the current leadership in Kyiv. On 24 May, President Zelenskyy submitted a draft law to the Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian Parliament) under which it is planned to increase the numerical strength of the Ukrainian armed forces further to reach 261,000 personnel.

Simultaneously, the President of Ukraine submitted another draft law, “On the fundamentals of national resistance”, for “urgent” consideration by the Parliament. Despite all the slogans about the need to ensure territorial defence, this is actually about subordinating the activities of the civilian authorities on the ground throughout the country to the interests of military planning. The idea is to involve broad sections of the population in the military paradigm of what is being referred to as “national resistance”. Moreover, instead of dialogue with Donbas on the foundations of a joint peaceful future, the draft law, making use of an idiosyncratic conceptual apparatus, announces that the Ukrainian military and security forces are to conduct special operations there as part of the implementation of tasks pertaining to the so-called “resistance movement”. The aim is to attract not only Ukrainian citizens but also foreigners to participate, on a confidential basis, in this movement. What are the Ukrainian military strategists planning? Acts of sabotage against bridges, power stations and railway tracks?

I would remind you that the aforementioned draft laws were personally put forward by President Zelenskyy. Previously he called into question on more than one occasion the blueprint for a settlement provided for in the Minsk Package of Measures of 12 February 2015. Yet, the basis of that blueprint, which was endorsed in United Nations Security Council resolution 2202, is dialogue between the Ukrainian authorities and the representatives of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

At the same time, a number of NATO countries continue to draw Ukraine into their military activities near the Russian borders. Seven joint exercises involving Ukraine and NATO countries are scheduled to be held in 2021. Together with the military supplies that are being delivered, including lethal weapons, conducting such exercises in a State that has an internal armed conflict going on in its eastern part is not conducive to dialogue between the conflict parties. Bearing in mind that exercises of this kind, as

intended by those who organize them, are bound to have an impact on the security situation in Ukraine, and also taking into account the mandate of the SMM, one of whose tasks is to “gather information and report on the security situation” (paragraph 3), we expect the Mission to pay close attention to the military exercises taking place on Ukrainian territory, which, among other things, involve the participation of foreign troops, and to incorporate relevant details into its reports.

One further point. The Ukrainian authorities are not disguising their intention to force the inhabitants of the country to change their linguistic identity by compelling them to use the Ukrainian language in all spheres of public life at the expense of their native tongues. This is cynically referred to as “soft Ukrainization” by the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy.

Particular zeal is being displayed by the State Language Protection Commissioner, Taras Kremen, who is actively seeking to reduce the space available for the use of other languages. Thus, in November last year, he demanded that the members of several local councils – in the Dnipropetrovsk, Zakarpattia, Zaporizhzhia, Luhansk, Mykolaiv, Odessa, Kherson and Chernivtsi regions – rescind their decisions granting other languages there the status of regional languages. Additionally, he sent a request to the Prosecutor General of Ukraine asking for pressure to be applied to that effect, including judicial pressure. In December 2020 and in April and May 2021, courts in Odessa, Zaporizhzhia and Kharkiv issued rulings stripping the Russian language of any status whatsoever.

Remarkably, when there proved to be not enough votes at the Mykolaiv city council on 20 May in favour of terminating the regional status of the Russian language, Mr. Kremen described the vote as “shoddy” and demanded that the prosecutorial authorities deal with the council members in question. The repressive nature of the office he holds, which was created in 2019, is obvious.

The policy of forced Ukrainization pursued by the Ukrainian Government runs contrary not only to Ukraine’s obligations under international law but also to the provisions of Ukrainian legislation itself. For example, it is inconsistent with Article 10 of the Constitution, which guarantees the “free development, use and protection” of the Russian language and the languages of national minorities; with Article 22, which states that “the content and scope of existing rights and freedoms shall not be diminished in the adoption of new laws or in the amendment of laws that are in force”; and with Article 24, which prohibits “privileges or restrictions” based on linguistic characteristics.

The lack of an international response – not least by the OSCE and its institutions – to the manifestations of the Ukrainian Government’s discriminatory approaches is leading to an intensification of social conflicts in Ukraine and making the prospect of settling the internal Ukrainian crisis increasingly less likely.

Thank you for your attention.