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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1274th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

9 July 2020

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

Mr. Chairperson,

We welcome the distinguished Ambassadors Heidi Grau and Yaşar Halit Çevik. The reports they have presented confirm that the momentum of the negotiation process to resolve the crisis in Ukraine is disappointing, and the situation on the ground remains difficult to predict.

Yesterday's meeting of the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) did not mark a breakthrough, despite the efforts of the "Normandy format" foreign policy advisers, who had attempted during a lengthy meeting in Berlin on 3 July to give fresh impetus to the work of the Minsk negotiation platform. The discussions in the TCG remain bogged down. There are still no agreed decisions in writing on a way out. There can be no talk of positive momentum.

More than six months after the meeting of the leaders of the "Normandy format" countries in Paris on 9 December 2019, the bulk of their instructions to the TCG remain unfulfilled. For example, one of the top-priority instructions was to agree on measures in support of the ceasefire regime. To that end, the representatives of the authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk submitted their proposals immediately after the summit. However, the problem lies with the categorical unwillingness of the Ukrainian side to confirm the Minsk agreements endorsed by the United Nations Security Council. What is more, the Ukrainian Government continues to take an uncompromising position, refusing to agree on a set of additional measures in support of a lasting ceasefire, including the publication of orders for a ceasefire and a ban on offensive and sabotage operations. All this demonstrates that the Ukrainian leadership has no interest in a genuine "silence regime", despite the understanding on this matter that already exists in the TCG.

We draw the distinguished Ambassador Grau's attention to this unacceptable situation.

As you are aware, the key to stopping the violence in Donbas lies in the achievement of a comprehensive political settlement. In keeping with the letter of the Package of Measures, the "political package" of the Minsk agreements should be implemented concurrently with the steps in the security sphere.

The Ukrainian Government itself confirmed at the “Normandy format” summit in Berlin in October 2016 that this needs to be done simultaneously. However, nothing has been done for years now. After the change in power in Ukraine in 2019, there were hopes for some progress. In March of this year, the Ukrainian Government was involved in the initiative to establish an Advisory Board as a dialogue platform for agreeing on political and legal decisions on the settlement. This was recorded in the minutes of the TCG meeting of 11 March. But then, the Ukrainian Government itself gave up on this idea, pushing further progress on the political track to the brink of failure.

Now we are hearing statements from the Ukrainian negotiators about how progress in this sphere is impossible without establishing military control over the territory of Donbas. Not to mention that they downright refuse to discuss any political solutions in direct dialogue with the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk, although this is clearly stipulated by the Package of Measures. Ukraine has still not submitted written proposals for implementing the “Steinmeier formula” in legislation on the special status of Donbas, and incorporating the provisions on this special status in the country’s Constitution as prescribed by the Package of Measures. The prospects for the initial suggestions submitted by the Ukrainian Government regarding the law on the special status and amnesty, without taking into account the opinion of the representatives of certain areas of Donbas, remain dim. In addition, the Ukrainian authorities have backtracked on their written guarantees regarding the non-prosecution of the detainees to be exchanged.

There has been no progress either on reaching an agreement with the authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk on modalities for crossing the line of contact. The economic blockade of Donbas continues unabated. The Ukrainian Government is only “concerned” on paper about the region’s population. In practice, it forces those who have not changed their place of residence in certain areas and are not “temporarily displaced persons” to obtain and periodically confirm this status in order to regain entitlement to pensions and social benefits. The April decision to suspend but not completely abolish this requirement during the epidemic is turned into a “handsome gesture” by the Ukrainian Government.

Instead of real steps by the Ukrainian Government towards de-escalation and a settlement, we are increasingly observing attempts by Ukrainian officials to ratchet up military hysteria. The hackneyed myth about an “external threat” is being exploited again as the campaign is launched in preparation for the local elections planned for the autumn. But there are also more worrying developments. For example, on 2 July, the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Ruslan Khomchak, announced that the Ukrainian military pays “much more attention and time to the training of troops for offensive operations in urban areas”. Similar remarks were also heard from the Commander of the Ukrainian Navy, Oleksiy Neizhpapa, on 5 July. This shows that active preparations are under way in Kyiv for a military scenario to resolve the “Donbas problem”.

Aggressive statements of this kind are accompanied by waves of armed violence, like the massive night-time shelling of the outskirts of Horlivka by the Ukrainian armed forces in the early hours of 6 July using large-calibre weapons. Civilians were forced to spend the night in their cellars to escape the exploding shells. Critical infrastructure facilities – a water pumping station and a water pipeline – were damaged, and seven transformer substations near the Komsomolets mine were left without power. We urge the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) to study the data on the damage caused by these attacks and to reflect this information fully in its reports.

We regret that both the appeal by the United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres, on 23 March for a ceasefire in all conflicts amidst the coronavirus pandemic and United Nations Security Council resolution 2532 of 1 July in support of that appeal have not received a proper response from the Ukrainian Government. In May, the number of civilian casualties in Donbas exceeded the highest figure of the past two years. The vast majority of them were recorded in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk

regions. Incidentally, in the summarized SMM reports (I emphasize – not the daily reports, but the summarized ones) we note that the victims are classified according to gender and age. However, there is no mention of one of the most significant indicators – information on their place of residence in relation to the line of contact. We believe that the publication of this information is important for providing an objective picture. I should like to hear from Mr. Çevik what is preventing this and how the Mission intends to remedy this omission.

The highest number of casualties recorded in a single month over the past two years confirms the need for the SMM to publish a thematic report on civilian casualties and the destruction of civilian objects. We are aware that the Albanian OSCE Chairmanship has repeatedly raised this issue, and we look forward to the swift publication of the report.

Ambassador Çevik,

We reiterate our principled support for the courageous efforts of all the SMM staff, who are working under difficult conditions involving shelling. Many of them are experiencing an additional burden in view of the necessary changes to the Mission's work during the coronavirus epidemic. Incidents connected with the safety of the monitors themselves are also a cause for particular concern. I am not only referring to shelling. On 1 July, a Ukrainian soldier pointed a gun at an SMM patrol that was passing through a checkpoint in Krasnohorivka (Donetsk region).

We are also very concerned about the attacks on the Mission's property. In that connection, we believe that the verbose and at times extremely ambiguous wording in the SMM reports is counter-productive. They should clarify the actual situation rather than provide grounds for contradictory understanding and interpretation of events. The Mission's spot report dated 1 July describing the incident at the Oktiabr mine (Donetsk region), when SMM cameras came under fire, is a case in point. In that connection, I should like to hear from you, Mr. Çevik, concrete information as to which side was most likely responsible for firing at the cameras in Petrivske (2 June), Shyrokyne (22 June) and at the Oktiabr mine (30 June). Does the Mission know what kind of weapons were used? All this is especially relevant in the light of the Ukrainian armed forces' bravado about their "ability to destroy equipment" mounted on different kinds of poles or pylons through the targeted use of precision weapons. A video clip about this was shown on Ukrainian television.

At the same time, it is important that the Mission does not focus exclusively on Donbas. The monitoring of the security situation near the line of contact is certainly a key task, but not the only one. The situation in the rest of the country also requires close scrutiny. In line with its mandate, the SMM should also monitor respect for human rights, including those aspects that have sparked a serious public outcry. In that connection, the mandate should not be reduced to the principle "we report what we see". The examples of the SMM monitoring the investigation into the deaths of Pavel Sheremet and Kateryna Handziuk confirm this.

Manifestations of aggressive nationalism and radicalism accompanied by street violence continue to have an impact on the security situation across Ukraine. Apparently, Ukraine's top leaders are also well aware of the scale of the problem. A few days ago, President Zelenskyi appealed to the law enforcement authorities to "prevent an escalation of street violence". At the same time, serious incidents connected with physical violence by National Corps radicals against political activists of the opposition movement in June have so far not been reflected in the SMM's reports. According to reports in the media, two of the victims (in Kharkiv and Vinnytsia) required serious medical care to keep them alive after being attacked. There are more than enough incidents involving manifestations of aggressive nationalism for a thematic report by the SMM.

The Mission's selective approach to the situation at the checkpoints on Ukraine's borders with other countries is also somewhat surprising. The reports contain information on some of them located in the south and east of the country, where it is said that the situation is calm. Meanwhile, over the past few months, in particular during the restrictions because of the coronavirus, tensions have escalated at Ukrainian checkpoints on the border with Hungary and Poland. Mention might be made, for example, of the queues of several thousand people at the border crossings with Poland in the Lviv region in March and June, or the protests announced in advance on the Ukrainian-Hungarian border, which were accompanied by clashes with law enforcement officers and damage to Ukrainian Border Service property. But these incidents were not covered by the SMM reports either.

It is important not to slacken the monitoring of the situation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. SMM observations confirm that the religious structure established by the previous leadership of Ukraine continues to exert pressure on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. The report presented today notes the rise in religious tensions, including cases of physical violence. The SMM also followed up on three arson attacks on religious properties in Odessa and in the Chernivtsi and Rivne regions in April. Incidentally, it is quite telling that as early as November 2019 the Ukrainian Security Service found grounds for instituting criminal proceedings against the former President, Petro Poroshenko, on suspicion of inciting inter-ethnic and religious hatred. We urge the Mission to follow this case, which is now being handled by the State Bureau of Investigation of Ukraine.

It is also necessary to keep an eye on the consequences of the Ukrainian Government's discriminatory legislation in the sphere of language and education, which is at odds with provisions of the country's Constitution and with Ukraine's OSCE commitments.

In conclusion, we emphasize that the current extraordinary situation brought about by the coronavirus pandemic only intensifies the need for the parties to the internal conflict in Ukraine to find compromises as quickly as possible. The main objective of the OSCE is to provide as much assistance as possible and to exclude the logic of war and violence. Speedy implementation is required of all the provisions of the Package of Measures of 12 February 2015 endorsed by the United Nations Security Council. This is the only framework for establishing lasting peace in Ukraine.

Thank you for your attention.