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PC.DEL/1112/19
11 October 2019

ENGLISH
Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. VLADIMIR ZHEGLOV,
DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1243rd MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

10 October 2019

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

Mr. Chairperson,

The disengagement of forces and hardware should have resumed this week in Petrivske and Zolote. The agreement to that effect was reached between the representatives of the Ukrainian Government and of the authorities of Donetsk and Luhansk in Minsk on 1 October. However, the Ukrainian side once again sabotaged this decision of the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) and put the process on hold indefinitely. In this connection, the comment by the Ukrainian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Vadym Prystaiko, regarding the Ukrainian Government's plans for disengagement – “the idea is that the Ukrainian troops will be able to return” – is very revealing.

The Ukrainian armed forces are dragging their heels as far as disengagement is concerned, despite the readiness of the militia to get started. The authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk sent the relevant notifications to the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), and signal rockets were launched in the presence of Mission staff to indicate their readiness. All this suggests that the real reason for the Ukrainian Government's delay in implementing the agreements reached in Minsk has nothing to do with security at all. Today's statements by the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyi, in which he said that he “would discuss later” how to stop the armed confrontation in Donbas, are telling. However, if this really is the goal, then it is not just a matter of discussing it, but of doing it immediately. All the agreements on a settlement have long been signed by the Ukrainian Government.

In a situation where the Ukrainian authorities are in no hurry to make progress on effective and agreed decisions on Donbas, the nationalists are seeking to take centre stage. They are ready to use any occasion to make their presence known. For example, members of paramilitary nationalist battalions, in particular Azov, have arrived in Zolote and announced their plans to obstruct disengagement there. If the Ukrainian armed forces begin to leave their positions, the radicals intend to establish their own combat positions inside the disengagement area. The deputy commander of the “Ukrainian volunteer army”, Andriy Herhert, made a similar statement regarding the other disengagement area in Petrivske. He has promised on behalf of his paramilitary structure to send in thousands of troops when the Ukrainian armed forces withdraw.

We repeat our position of principle: ignoring the rampant radical nationalism in Ukraine could lead to the most regrettable consequences. We have noted that the SMM described the protests organized by radicals in Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities as “peaceful gatherings” in its reports. The Mission called the actions of radicals in Zolote on 6 October the same thing. If we look at the video footage in the Ukrainian media, however, many of the participants in these events were yelling anything but peaceful slogans, calling not only for the disengagement of forces to be obstructed and even for the withdrawal from the Minsk agreements, but also for attacks on dissidents. On 9 October, a police officer was injured when nationalist activists forced their way through a Ukrainian Ministry of the Interior checkpoint near Zolote.

We expect the SMM to carefully monitor the radicals’ actions, make sure that this information is reflected in detail in their reports and also prepare a thematic report on the manifestations of aggressive nationalism, neo-Nazism and xenophobia in Ukraine. Given the Ukrainian Government’s disruption of the disengagement efforts, there needs to be a proper assessment of what is happening and a clear response on the part of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine and in the Trilateral Contact Group, Martin Sajdik, and the Chief Monitor of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, Yaşar Halit Çevik.

As for the situation at the line of contact in general, it does not inspire optimism. According to the SMM, the number of ceasefire violations has returned to the average figures prior to the “bread truce”. On 5 October, it almost set an abysmal record, exceeding 2,700 ceasefire violations in 24 hours. Once again, all the destruction over the past week occurred in militia-controlled territory. For the 14th time since the start of the year, the functioning school building in Zolote-5/Mykhailivka suffered damage. A clinic was damaged in Staromykhailivka, and a civilian who had sought refuge in his home during the shelling there was injured. Shells also fell on houses in Dokuchaievsk.

It is important to understand that a long-term and viable settlement of the crisis in Ukraine is possible only if there is simultaneous and interlinked progress not only on security issues but also on the political track. It appears, however, that the new Ukrainian leadership – like the previous authorities – intends to continue avoiding implementing the political provisions of the Minsk Package of Measures.

The Ukrainian Government no longer seems to be trying to hide that the agreement of the text of the “Steinmeier formula” on 1 October in Minsk was considered by Ukraine solely in the context of removing obstacles to the organization of a summit in the “Normandy format”. This linkage is so artificial that it does not stand up to scrutiny. I would remind you that the “Steinmeier formula” is a concession to the Ukrainian Government and concerns the procedure for the entry into force of the special status of Donbas. These are specific political commitments that the Ukrainian Government must incorporate into national legislation.

Attempts by the Ukrainian leadership to restart in the “Normandy format” the main discussions on key issues make the prospect of a settlement less likely. We see that this is being done against the backdrop of the plans announced by President Zelenskyi to adopt a new law on the special status of Donbas. For some reason, the Ukrainian Government is not planning to discuss this with the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk, although the Package of Measures expressly provides for this. There have also been statements contrary to the Package of Measures that the special status will not be permanent and will not be enshrined in the Constitution of Ukraine. One has the feeling that the Ukrainian side is demanding a “Normandy summit” to revise the agreements reached at the previous meetings of the leaders of France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine, and also the decisions hammered out by the TCG in Minsk.

Every day of delay in the settlement has a negative impact on the humanitarian situation in the region. The SMM draws attention to the difficult situation surrounding the temporary reception centres for internally displaced persons. As the cold weather approaches, many of them have begun to experience

problems with their electricity and heating supply, and some of them are at risk of being shut down altogether.

Over 10,000 people a day use the only checkpoint at present on the line of contact in the Luhansk region, which is located on the bridge in Stanytsia Luhanska. The repair of the destroyed part of the bridge should not be delayed. It is vital to finish this before the really cold weather arrives. We trust that the restoration work will be completed, as planned, by the start of December.

Incidentally, the completion of the disengagement of forces and hardware in Stanytsia Luhanska, Petrivske and Zolote in good faith will enable dialogue in the TCG to get moving on many other aspects of a settlement, including the opening of new checkpoints at the line of contact. Increasing its throughput capacity will have a positive effect on the overall humanitarian situation in Donbas. By delaying the process of the disengagement of forces and hardware today, the Ukrainian Government is standing in the way of the resolution of a number of important issues.

In the presidential and parliamentary elections held in Ukraine this year, Volodymyr Zelenskyi and his party received a mandate of trust from Ukrainian society, first and foremost to achieve peace in Donbas and resolve the socio-political crisis in the country as a whole.

The continuing attacks on media outlets that allow critical comments about what is happening in the country are evidence of the depth of the crisis. Three television channels have come under pressure from the current authorities. The National Television and Radio Broadcasting Council of Ukraine refused to extend the licences of companies that rebroadcast the signal of the “112 Ukraine” channel. Earlier, the Council asked the court to revoke the “NewsOne” TV channel’s licence. An unscheduled inspection of the “ZIK” TV channel was initiated in September. The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Harlem Désir, has already expressed concern about this situation.

We hope that the Ukrainian leadership will demonstrate and exercise the political will to extricate the country from the crisis. This is possible only if the interests of the inhabitants of all regions, including Donbas, are taken into account.

We urge the Ukrainian Government to use the full potential of the Trilateral Contact Group to carry out the joint decisions with the authorities of Donetsk and Luhansk on the implementation of the Minsk Package of Measures endorsed by the United Nations Security Council.

Thank you for your attention.