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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1134th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

16 February 2017

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

Mr. Chairperson,

Two years have elapsed since the signing of the Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements, which was endorsed by a United Nations Security Council resolution. This made it possible to reduce significantly the number of victims of the punitive operation and prevent large-scale hostilities. The parameters of a political settlement, which would protect the rights and interests of the people of Donbas, were given concrete form. A sequence of steps was established for the normalization of the situation, a return to peaceful life and reconciliation in society.

Work has been intensified in the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) through the establishment of working groups on the implementation of the relevant aspects of the Minsk agreements, which reflect the composition of the TCG. In this format it became possible to ensure direct dialogue among the parties to the conflict, which is the key to a peaceful settlement. This has yielded some results: an exchange of prisoners, local truces to enable the restoration of infrastructure, and additional agreements on the withdrawal of equipment and on areas for the disengagement of forces and hardware.

We welcome the results achieved at the TCG meetings in Minsk. The agreement on the withdrawal by 20 February of weapons from the line of contact is an important step in the right direction. The resumption of work in the Working Group on Economic Issues also sends a positive signal.

Unfortunately, owing to the position taken by the Ukrainian Government, most of the Package of Measures remains unimplemented. We have heard Ukraine's explanation for the non-implementation of the Minsk agreements – external forces are to blame for everything and the Ukrainian Government does not owe anyone anything. A year ago, we quoted one of the Ukrainian Government's representatives to the TCG, the adviser to the President of Ukraine, Mr. Volodymyr Horbulin: "The decisions taken to date as part of the Minsk process are, to a large extent, the result of the pressure of critical circumstances and external factors, and therefore their binding force rests solely on Ukraine's goodwill. The main and sole

stratagem of the Ukrainian State is to buy time and build up its strength”. These words have been borne out completely. The Ukrainian Government has no intention of implementing the Minsk agreements voluntarily. Instead, there is blatant sabotage and attempts to modify that document. Under various pretexts, work is being delayed on the political aspects of the Package of Measures – the agreement of modalities for local elections, the enactment of the law on special status, an amnesty (of which the Ukrainian security forces will undoubtedly need to make use), not to mention constitutional reform.

Statements by President Petro Poroshenko arguing that elections can be held only once control of the border has been transferred to the Ukrainian Government are a direct violation of the Package of Measures. The statement by a representative of the Ukrainian Government regarding the results of yesterday’s TCG meeting is in a similar vein: elections will, they say, take place after the full implementation of the Minsk agreements. I have to remind you that elections in Donbas are not the final but an intermediate stage in the implementation of the Minsk agreements. There can be no talk of restoring control of the border without elections being held, the modalities of which “will be discussed and agreed upon with representatives of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in the framework of the Trilateral Contact Group” (point 12 of the Package of Measures), and also without the ensuing comprehensive political settlement, including constitutional reform (points 9 and 11). The Ukrainian Government’s obstructive position became apparent once again at the TCG meeting in Minsk, when it again refused to set out the so-called Steinmeier formula for the enactment of the law on special status. This is effectively an attempt to derail the agreements reached at the Normandy format summits in Paris and Berlin.

Even the Ukrainians themselves, it would appear, are beginning to wise up to the situation. According to a survey conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, 65.5 per cent of Ukrainians, not including the residents of Donbas, are convinced that the hostilities will continue, since this is beneficial to the Ukrainian Government, while 38.8 per cent believe that the Government is deliberately obstructing the implementation of the Minsk agreements.

The authorities in Kyiv need to maintain constant tension in Donbas and periodically arrange provocations in order for all the problems concerning domestic development to be attributed to this and to be able to ask for money from foreign donors and creditors. However, it cannot go on like this forever. We consider it important to work together to convince the Ukrainian Government that the implementation of the Package of Measures is not an impasse for Ukraine, but its salvation enabling it to preserve its sovereignty and territorial integrity. We trust that the forthcoming contacts within the Normandy format will enable progress to be made in this direction.

The situation at the line of contact is cause for serious concern. Following some reduction in the number of violations of the ceasefire regime at the start of the week, the situation has deteriorated again. Indiscriminate shelling of militia-controlled towns and villages continues. A State-owned chemical factory in the Kuibyshevskiy district of Donetsk was hit on 14 February. Monitors reported the destruction of houses and civilian infrastructure in Donetsk, Donetsk, Kominternove and Molodizhne as a result of artillery strikes from the directions where Ukrainian security forces are stationed. The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) recorded the shelling of Novooleksandrivka on the line of contact from a north-westerly direction, in other words from positions held by the Ukrainian armed forces. There was another attempt to seize the elevated area near Kominternove.

The SMM places emphasis on the presence of a significant quantity of Ukrainian military equipment in the security zone. Between 6 and 13 February, in violation of the Package of Measures and the Addendum to it, the monitors discovered 63 units of weaponry belonging to the Ukrainian armed forces, including multiple-launch rocket systems (MLRS) in Aslanove, Dobropillia and Kulykivske; howitzers in Aslanove, Bohoyavlenka, Verkhokamianka, Voitove, Dmytrivka, Lysychansk, Novoaidar and Pryvilne; an anti-tank gun in Shchastia. Flights by military aircraft have been recorded in Kurakhove in violation of point 7 of the Minsk Memorandum. In addition to these weapons, according to the SMM, 78 armoured personnel carriers belonging to the Ukrainian armed forces are present in the security zone, and 134 units of Ukrainian military equipment are immediately behind the withdrawal lines.

The presence of a large quantity of weapons belonging to the Ukrainian armed forces and the moving up of reserves and nationalist battalions into the conflict zone in Donbas is evidence of the Ukrainian security forces' readiness to switch to offensive operations at any moment. The Ukrainian Government may time this to coincide with a major international event, as has happened in the past.

We call on the SMM to intensify its patrols along the entire line of contact, continue to monitor the movement of heavy weapons, and carefully verify reports on the deployment of MLRS and Tochka-U tactical missiles.

The situation outside the conflict zone also requires close attention. The draft law on the temporarily occupied territories, which has been submitted to the Verkhovna Rada, has already provoked concern among international organizations, but escaped the attention of the SMM monitors.

Nevertheless, OSCE representatives report important incidents such as attacks by nationalists on branches of Russian banks – the most recent incident was reported in Kharkiv – and on an art exhibition on the Maidan's achievements. The persecution of journalists in Ukraine continues, to which the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media has drawn attention. As far as we are aware, the murders of Oles Buzina and Pavel Sheremet remain uninvestigated.

The blockade by radical groups of the railway line across the line of contact continues. According to the information available, the humanitarian consequences of this action by the radicals could be even more serious than the consequences of the recent exacerbation of the shelling near Donetsk. The Government's position regarding this situation remains unclear, as does the attitude of the central authorities to the "volunteer battalions", which are frequently guilty of provocations at the line of contact. The incident reported by the SMM between a Ukrainian army unit and a group of radicals near Chonhar on the border with Russia is symptomatic of the unending lawlessness in Ukraine.

In conclusion, we should point out that however painful the need for the implementation of the Minsk agreements is for the Ukrainian authorities, there is no sensible alternative to this.

Thank you for your attention.