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DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,  
AT THE 1287th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL  
VIA VIDEO TELECONFERENCE**

29 October 2020

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

Mr. Chairperson,

On 25 October, local elections took place in Ukraine. In violation of its OSCE commitments (paragraph 8 of the CSCE Copenhagen Document from 1990), the Ukrainian authorities did not allow Russian citizens to take part in monitoring the elections. This is something to which the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) has drawn attention as well, namely in its statement of preliminary findings and conclusions issued once the voting had been completed. I must emphasize that the exclusion of Russian citizens from the election observation process was done under false pretexts and on a discriminatory basis.

In any case, the elections have not helped to bring stability to domestic political life in the country. Nor have they met the expectations of those who had reckoned on society rallying around the current policy line of the Ukrainian leadership. That is incidentally not surprising if one bears in mind, for example, the findings of sociological surveys conducted shortly before the elections. Thus, according to the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, in October around 70 per cent of the inhabitants of Ukraine held the view that events in the country were moving in the wrong direction. Among the priority issues causing concern to Ukrainians is the unresolved conflict in the east of the country – a conflict that President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his political team had promised, more than a year ago, to resolve in the course of 2020.

The meetings of the Minsk-based Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) and its working groups held on 27 and 28 October unfortunately failed, yet again, to bring about any substantive headway in the settlement process. Despite the relatively stable situation that has prevailed along the line of contact for three months now, the authorities in Kyiv continue to sabotage the instructions issued within the “Normandy format” regarding the need for simultaneous progress on tackling political and security issues.

The political process is blocked as a result of the unwillingness of the Ukrainian authorities to regard the representatives of certain areas of Donbas as participants in that process – something that goes against the provisions of the Minsk agreements and the instructions from the “Normandy format” summit held in Paris on 9 December 2019. This stance is, to all appearances, part of a more general striving to prevent not

only the residents of certain areas of Donbas but also hundreds of thousands of other inhabitants of the region from having any influence on the processes taking place in the country. For example, the ODIHR has estimated that around half a million Ukrainian citizens – the inhabitants of 18 areas adjacent to the line of contact – were, so to speak, left out in the cold as far as the elections of 25 October are concerned, as a result of decisions taken by the Ukrainian authorities. And yet in 2019, when the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) recorded a far greater number of exchanges of fire in Donbas, all these people had the opportunity to vote in both the presidential and parliamentary elections. On the “election” day, the inhabitants of Donbas were not allowed to participate either in the opinion poll, conducted at the President’s behest, concerning the possibility of granting their region the conditions of a free economic zone. By the way, the head of the Ukrainian delegation to the TCG negotiations, Leonid Kravchuk, tried this summer to gain acceptance for the notion that a special status for Donbas should be limited exclusively to economic aspects – once again something that does not tally with the provisions of the Minsk Package of Measures and that fails to take any account of the opinion of the actual representatives of Donbas.

As is well known, the discussions within the TCG’s Political Working Group have stalled following the adoption by the Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian Parliament), on 15 July 2020, of Resolution No. 795-IX on the scheduling of regular local elections in 2020. Incidentally, as was pointed out by the co-ordinator of another TCG working group (the one on security issues), Yaşar Halit Çevik, during the briefing he gave on 23 October, the aforementioned resolution has led to a standstill in other respects, too – for example, in reaching agreement on decisions concerning new areas for disengagement of forces and hardware and demining sites, and also in completing the work on an updated demining plan.

We have been told on a number of occasions that the Verkhovna Rada’s resolution on local elections was of a “technical” nature and that after the elections of 25 October it would at any rate no longer be relevant. However, that is not the case. As may be inferred from the pronouncements by Ukrainian officials, the provisions of that resolution, which are at variance with the Package of Measures as far as the sequence of steps in the political settlement process is concerned, very much reflect the current negotiating stance of the Ukrainian Government.

Thus, among the Ukrainian leadership it is being stated more and more openly that they are striving for new contacts through “Normandy format” channels with a view to revising the Minsk agreements. On 26 October, the deputy head of the Ukrainian delegation to the TCG negotiations, Oleksiy Reznikov, who is also Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Reintegration, said the following in an interview on a Ukrainian television channel: “It wouldn’t be a problem at all to get together at the level of the ‘Normandy format’ leaders and revise [the] Minsk [package]. To be honest, there are parts where it works, parts where it might work and parts where it will never work. Let us slowly undertake such a revision and rewrite it.” He again called for so-called modernization of the principal document underlying the settlement process, adding that “a 100 per cent implementation of the Minsk agreements is impossible, if only because of the fact that first of all control of the border has to be established, with local elections to be conducted afterwards, whereas [the] Minsk [package] has it the other way round”. As one can see, this is yet another blatant confirmation of the refusal of the Ukrainian Government’s representatives to adhere to the letter and the spirit of the Minsk Package of Measures of 12 February 2015, which was endorsed by United Nations Security Council resolution 2202.

Every day that passes with the Ukrainian Government persisting in its lack of political will to undertake responsible and full implementation of the Package of Measures brings yet more suffering to the inhabitants of eastern Ukraine, including the most vulnerable population groups there. For example, the figures reported by the SMM indicate that, in this year alone, 12 children have suffered injuries as a result of shelling and mine explosions; one child was even killed. We know that the Mission continues to work on a

systematic compilation of data on civilian casualties of the conflict. We trust that such a summary report will be submitted for our scrutiny in the near future.

We are concerned about the exchanges of fire intensifying near the Donetsk filtration station. As reported by the SMM, the number of violations of the “silence regime” last week was almost twice that observed in the preceding week. Firing weapons near vital infrastructure facilities is unacceptable.

The situation at checkpoints for crossing the line of contact remains dire. The continued socio-economic blockade of Donbas by the Ukrainian Government, along with the closing of entry-exit checkpoints, is making things even more difficult for local residents. For example, the only such checkpoint in the Luhansk region, namely the one on the bridge at Stanytsia Luhanska, is non-operational. As reported by the SMM, the humanitarian reasons and criteria in accordance with which persons may pass through that checkpoint in exceptional cases are not clear even to the officials from the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine who are responsible for facilitating such crossings (report dated 24 October 2020). In that sense, it is particularly important not only that the agreement on fully opening two new checkpoints in the Luhansk region in November, namely at Zolote and Shchastia, should be implemented in a timely manner, but also that the Ukrainian Government and the authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk should reach an agreement, within the TCG framework, on the special arrangements for how these checkpoints are to operate during the coronavirus pandemic.

Now to something else. In Ukraine there continues to be a persistently high level of ill feeling, accompanied by manifestations of violence against members of national minorities, civil rights and political activists, journalists and community leaders. The members of nationalistic movements and adherents of radical ideas who are behind many of these excesses very often make no attempt to conceal their part in such acts of intimidation.

In its weekly report issued on 27 October the SMM drew attention to the latest manifestation of aggressive nationalism and anti-Semitism in Ukraine: on 18 October, two Hasidic teenagers were attacked near a holy pilgrimage site in the city of Uman (Cherkasy region). A few days earlier, on 14 October, far right extremists marched through Kyiv chanting nationalistic slogans to commemorate the anniversary of the founding of the “Ukrainian Insurgent Army”. This event, whose anti-Semitic nature was disguised by allegedly patriotic messages and which took place right in front of the Presidential Administration Building in Kyiv, was likewise recorded by the SMM, namely in its report dated 15 October.

The Mission has previously reported other cases of intolerance accompanied by violence: how a bus came under fire and opposition activists were beaten up in Liubotyn in the Kharkiv region (report dated 28 August [and weekly report dated 1 September]); an attack on a synagogue in Mariupol (weekly report dated 1 September); and clashes with members of the Roma community in the settlement of Andriivka in the Kharkiv region (weekly report dated 8 September). We would remind you in this context of the long-overdue need for the SMM not only to step up its monitoring of such incidents but also to catalogue information on manifestations of aggressive nationalism, neo-Nazism and xenophobia in a dedicated thematic report.

The tolerance of aggressive nationalism by the Ukrainian authorities and law enforcement agencies enables the majority of the organizers and perpetrators of such acts to avoid being called to account for their incitement to hatred. That is not surprising in a context where the rationale for many of the actions of the Ukrainian authorities continues to be governed not simply by a desire to pander to nationalists but by elementary Russophobia, which defies explanation. For example, in keeping with a decision of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine, over 12,000 permits for the import of Russian-language publications into the country have been cancelled since 2017, while more than 8,000 applications have been

rejected. Overall, more than 29.3 million printed products have been banned. The most absurd thing is that even books for toddlers such as *Transport* and *Why Is the Sky Blue?* have fallen under this ban: the Ukrainian censors contrived to detect “propagation of totalitarian ideology” in such works, too.

All this is not conducive to nationwide dialogue aimed at achieving a sustainable settlement of the crisis. We call on the OSCE and Ukraine’s external “minders” to bring maximum influence to bear on the country’s leadership so as to induce it to act in the interests of peace and civil accord. In order to end the conflict in eastern Ukraine, it is necessary to ensure that the Ukrainian authorities commit themselves to genuine implementation of the Package of Measures on the basis of direct and meaningful dialogue between the Ukrainian Government and the authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk.

Thank you for your attention.