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**STATEMENT BY MR. VLADIMIR ZHEGLOV,
DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1321st MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

24 June 2021

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

Madam Chairperson,

We note the lack of progress in the settlement of the crisis in eastern Ukraine. The headway that could have been made during the latest round of meetings of the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) and its working groups on 22 and 23 June proved to be elusive because of the obstructionist stance adopted by the Ukrainian authorities. Over in Kyiv they continue to avoid working on the implementation of the Minsk agreements on the basis of substantive direct dialogue with the representatives of certain areas of Donbas. Against this backdrop, with the support of a number of foreign political sponsors of the current Ukrainian leadership, the myth about some imaginary “Russian aggression” continues to be propagated there, which merely renders the prospect of internal Ukrainian peace arrangements more remote. All in all, the discussions that took place at the TCG unfortunately concluded once again without any results.

On the eve of these meetings, the Ukrainian military carried out a fresh act of armed provocation in Donbas. It is the same approach as before, namely, an attempt, it would seem, to precipitate a local aggravation of the conflict immediately before a TCG meeting so as to be able to invoke the unsatisfactory security situation as a pretext for blocking, *inter alia*, a political settlement.

On 21 June, as reported by the authorities in Donetsk, four members of the Donbas militia were killed and five were wounded near the settlements of Lozove and Staromykhailivka (in certain areas of the Donetsk region) as a result of the shelling with mortars followed by grenades of an ambulance convoy – yes, an ambulance convoy, it must be stressed – belonging to the militia, which was travelling with the knowledge of the Ukrainian authorities and was fitted with appropriate identification signs. As noted, the shelling was carried out from Krasnohorivka, which is under the control of the Ukrainian armed forces. Scores of explosions were also recorded in that area by the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) (report dated 22 June). We must emphasize that these incidents occurred despite the ceasefire-strengthening measures of 22 July 2020 being in force, which forbid any type of firing.

This is now the second armed provocation over the past two weeks leading to tensions in Donbas. We recall that, on 11 June, a sabotage and reconnaissance group of the Ukrainian military attacked an observation post of the Luhansk militia near the settlement of Holubivske, as a result of which five people

were killed. By a strange coincidence, this sortie was conducted after the telephone conversation of 8 June between the Presidents of Ukraine and the United States of America and after President Zelenskyy's visit to the line of contact in Donbas on 8 and 9 June, but also shortly before several important international events at which Ukrainian matters were touched upon: the Group of Seven and NATO summits, the European Union-US summit, and the meeting between President Putin and President Biden.

The ceasefire can and must be observed under the condition of abandoning the tactic of armed provocations and fully involving "a co-ordination mechanism for responding to ceasefire violations through the facilitation of the Joint Centre for Control and Co-ordination (JCCC) in its current setting", as stipulated under the existing arrangements. The Ukrainian military continues stubbornly to avoid relevant contacts with the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk in the JCCC's current setting, thereby undermining the "silence regime".

The Ukrainian Government's reluctance to enter into dialogue with the authorities in Donbas is holding back progress on all aspects of the settlement process. Among other things, this includes its humanitarian aspects. During an informal briefing for the OSCE participating States on 21 June, the Co-ordinator of the TCG Working Group on Humanitarian Issues, Toni Frisch, made this unequivocally clear. We fully share his view that a sustainable settlement is impossible without direct dialogue between the representatives of the Ukrainian Government and the authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk. Elements of such a dialogue have taken place as part of the direct contacts between the ombudsmen of the parties, which have made possible several exchanges of detainees in Donbas. Yet, since the middle of last year one may observe to this day a clear lack of political will on the part of the Ukrainian Government with regard to continuing that dialogue.

We shall cite a couple of examples to which attention was drawn by the distinguished Co-ordinator, Ambassador Frisch. The Ukrainian authorities have not extended "legal clearance" to most of the individuals handed over to the authorities in Donbas as part of the exchanges that have taken place. Criminal charges have not been dropped: indeed, charges have even been brought anew against some of those involved in these exchanges, as a result of which they have once again been put on the wanted list. Consequently, the written undertakings given in December 2019 and April 2020 by the head of Ukraine's delegation to the TCG that the Ukrainian Government would provide legal guarantees regarding the non-prosecution of released Donbas residents remain unfulfilled. All this makes it impossible for the parties to begin preparations for the next exchanges.

Significantly, having obstructed the work on releasing individuals caught up in the conflict and detaining many of them on its territory, Ukraine refuses to reach agreement with the representatives of Donbas in the TCG on a declaration against the use of torture – a declaration to which the authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk have long since given their tentative consent. It is telling that the representatives of Ukraine have chosen not to discuss this matter even during the run-up to the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, which is to be observed on 26 June.

Lastly, there continue to be difficulties in implementing one of the key recommendations from the Normandy Four summit held in Paris on 9 December 2019, namely to agree on and open new checkpoints along the line of contact on the basis of humanitarian criteria. These difficulties are also due to Ukraine's reluctance to engage in constructive contacts with the authorities in Donbas. Thus, the simultaneous opening of the two checkpoints in Zolote and Shchastia on both sides of the line of contact in the Luhansk region has been impeded by the Ukrainian Government not being prepared to provide round-the-clock security guarantees there or to ensure that the parties are able to conduct "mirror patrols" in the areas adjacent to the line of contact. These measures are essential for the safe movement of civilians.

Now on to other matters. On 15 June, as we pointed out in our earlier statement, there took place in Kyiv a prayer vigil involving several thousands of the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), the participants of which came together from all over the country, assembling before the walls of the Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian Parliament) and also converging on the building of the Office of the President of Ukraine. They handed over to the authorities their proposals on ways of overcoming the Ukrainian Government's destructive interference in religious affairs, on ending the repression of the UOC and on measures to protect the UOC believers from further discrimination.¹ This event elicited a response from President Zelenskyy among others.

Unfortunately, the SMM completely ignored this public gathering, reflecting it neither in its daily nor in its weekly reports. On the other hand, the Mission's reports do contain, for example, information on a small demonstration that took place the day before in front of the building of the Ukrainian Parliament and was concerned with State regulation of film production. We call on the Mission to fulfil its mandate properly and responsibly. Facts do matter.

We also urge that there be no letting up in the OSCE's attention to the Ukrainian authorities' ongoing infringements of the rights of journalists from non-State media, the establishment of censorship in the information space, the suppression of dissent and the persecution of dissidents. There is a need for information on the development of the situation with regard to President Zelenskyy's extrajudicial ban on eight television companies – including three major nationwide television news channels: 112 Ukraine, NewsOne and ZIK – and on the blocking of hundreds of Internet resources, including news portals hosted on sites with Ukrainian, Russian, German, Italian and Israeli domain names. In this respect, it is important to ensure not only that the SMM monitors and supports human rights and fundamental freedoms, but that there is also an effective response by the specialized institutions of our Organization, including the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, which should be aimed at preventing the Ukrainian Government from violating its OSCE commitments.

We call on the foreign "minders" of the current Ukrainian authorities to bring their influence to bear with a view to inducing the latter to engage in constructive nationwide dialogue. The crisis in eastern Ukraine can and must be resolved on the basis of full implementation of the Package of Measures of 12 February 2015, which was endorsed by United Nations Security Council resolution 2202 and is the sole framework for peace in Donbas. The direct dialogue stipulated therein between the representatives of the Ukrainian Government and the authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk within the TCG framework is an integral element of that process and is essential for achieving a viable settlement.

Thank you for your attention.

1 A video of the event is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCBqdvFPp0A>