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OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION TO THE  
TRILATERAL CONTACT GROUP ON UKRAINE, AT THE  
OSCE ANNUAL SECURITY REVIEW CONFERENCE**

31 August 2021

**Special session: Ensuring security and stability in the OSCE region in light of  
developments with respect of Ukraine**

Madam Chairperson,  
Distinguished participants,

By way of preliminary remarks, I should like to remind those who spoke before me that what we are engaged in today is not a continuation of the summit of the so-called Crimea Platform but a discussion of problems relating to the settlement process in south-eastern Ukraine. Unfortunately, apart from groundless accusations of aggression, annexation, the creation of a military threat against Ukraine and so on levelled against Russia, we have heard neither objective assessments of the current status of the settlement process, nor any constructive proposals for overcoming the conflict that would ensure the restoration of peace and calm in Donbas.

Regrettably, it is necessary to begin with a sad statement of fact: as far as the settlement of the internal Ukrainian conflict in Donbas is concerned – given what we have just heard, I should stress that it is very much an internal Ukrainian conflict – the situation has not only not improved in the course of the year that has passed since the last Annual Security Review Conference, but, rather, has deteriorated on the whole. The Ukrainian Government not only continues to pursue a course aimed at sabotaging the implementation of the Minsk agreements in the form that they were concluded – including calls for the Minsk Package of Measures of 12 February 2015 to be revised – but is also creating ever new obstacles for that purpose, not least at the legislative level.

Thus, the possibility of granting a special status to Donbas and enshrining that in the country's Constitution continues to be ruled out as before.

With a doggedness that could be put to better use, attempts continue to be undertaken to get out of implementing the key provision of the Minsk agreements, namely direct dialogue with the representatives of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions – among other ways, by discrediting those very representatives. Moreover, the high-handed argument continues to be made that negotiations should be conducted exclusively with Russia, since it is allegedly a party to the conflict. In refusing to consider the

constructive proposals from the authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk, which include relevant draft texts, the Ukrainian delegation is openly stating that it will review such documents only if Russia assumes their authorship.

In that respect, it is lamentable that those who, by virtue of their status as mediators, ought to be facilitating implementation by the Ukrainian Government of the relevant provisions of the Minsk Package of Measures are instead delivering statements that encourage Ukraine to flout its obligations.

The Minsk format itself and its role and effectiveness are also belittled as part of the striving to drag key issues of the settlement process over to the “Normandy format” level. Additionally, the representatives of the Ukrainian Government are attempting in their statements to impose their own sequence for implementation of the Minsk agreements: starting with security, that is, the withdrawal of foreign armed formations and the disarming of illegal groups, control of the Ukrainian-Russian border, and only then moving on to a political settlement and the holding of elections. Furthermore, they view the Minsk process merely as a means of maintaining the pressure of sanctions on Russia.

After the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (the Ukrainian Parliament) adopted, on 15 July 2020, a resolution on the holding of local elections, which was directly at odds with the Minsk Package of Measures, the work of the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) on a political settlement of the conflict effectively reached a deadlock. As a way out of the current situation, the representatives of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions proposed drawing up a “road map”, that is, a joint document strictly in line with the Package of Measures that would be approved by the Verkhovna Rada and the leadership of Ukraine, thereby opening up the prospect for a just settlement to be achieved for Donbas in accordance with United Nations Security Council resolution 2202. This was supported by Russia, which, among other things, submitted observations in writing on that score.

However, the Ukrainian side, having refused point-blank to review the document from the authorities in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions and to submit written comments thereon, proposed its own alternative version, in which 40 paragraphs (out of a total of 51) directly or indirectly run counter to the Minsk agreements. The Ukrainian text, in particular, provides for “the return of units of the Ukrainian armed forces to their permanent bases in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions” and for the reinstatement of full control of the Ukrainian-Russian border before elections are held in Donbas. After that, in accordance with the law on an amnesty prepared by the Ukrainian side, it is planned to “sift through” the population – to be followed, as one can only assume, by the internment of “unreliable” people identified among those who have received Russian passports and the organization of “tribunals” to deal with those rejecting the policies of the Maidan authorities.

It has finally proved possible to unblock the work of the TCG’s Political Working Group, which for a long time remained paralysed owing to the demand by the Ukrainian Government’s negotiators that Maya Pirogova, who in Ukraine had been sentenced for terrorism, be removed from the delegation representing the Donetsk People’s Republic. However, despite this, there are no discernible prospects of progress being achieved, since the Ukrainian side is unwilling to concentrate on efforts directly aimed at reaching agreement on a joint action plan and ultimately providing comments on the draft text from certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, rather than just submitting replies to the questions in Pierre Morel’s so-called table, drawn up by the Political Working Group’s former co-ordinator, which merely serve to distract from the main task, that is, from a political settlement of the conflict.

Moreover, it is important to note that the accomplishment of this task is by no means made easier by the draft law on a transitional period in Donbas currently being reviewed by the Verkhovna Rada, for not only does that draft law eliminate the possibility of granting a special status to Donbas but it is also

completely contrary to the stipulations of the Package of Measures, which provide for an amnesty, the full resumption of socio-economic ties with Donbas, the holding of local elections there before the reinstatement of the Ukrainian Government's control of the relevant segment of the Ukrainian-Russian border, and so on.

Additionally, draft laws on the legal aspects of a special status for certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, as provided for by the recommendations from the Normandy Four summit held in Paris in 2019, have still not been submitted to the authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk.

Work on humanitarian issues has unfortunately been blocked owing to the Ukrainian side's attempts to arrogate to itself the right to determine the composition of the delegation from certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, and its refusal to participate in meetings until Ms. Pirogova, who had been transferred to the relevant TCG working group, is removed. At the same time, there remain obstacles to continuing the exchanges of detained persons because of the procrastination, which has become chronic, on the part of the Ukrainian authorities in implementing their commitments on "legal clearance" with regard to individuals previously released and allowed to return to certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

Owing to the position of the Ukrainian side, which is dragging its heels when it comes to agreeing on specific parameters for the operation of the entry-exit checkpoint in Zolote (crossing points along the line of contact; the provision of indefinite round-the-clock security guarantees, including patrolling by personnel from the Joint Centre for Control and Co-ordination (JCCC) on both sides of the line of contact), implementation of the agreement on simultaneously opening two entry-exit checkpoints in that settlement and in Shchastia remains at a standstill.

The situation is no better when it comes to implementation of the socio-economic provisions of the Minsk Package. The only things that it has proved possible to agree on after seven years of discussions are ensuring the water supply for the region, the conduct of an audit at the company "Voda Donbasu" (mediated by the International Committee of the Red Cross) and the rebuilding of the bridge at Stanytsia Luhanska. However, other highly pressing issues – above all, the payment of pensions and social benefits, and ultimately lifting the virtually total economic blockade of the region – are yet to be resolved.

Some headway may be seen only in the establishment of a group of environmental experts (dealing mainly with the flooding of mines that are being closed) involving Ukraine, certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, and Russia, although the Package of Measures does not include tackling issues of this kind among the priority tasks for settling the conflict.

As for security issues, certain progress was made in tackling these during the period under consideration. Pursuant to the instructions issued at the Paris summit, agreement has been reached in principle on four additional areas for the disengagement of the parties' forces and hardware (Slovianoserbsk, Hryhorivka, Petrivka and Nyzhnoteple) and on a new demining plan and an associated framework decision, although their formalization is contingent upon agreement on, and approval of, the aforementioned action plan ("road map") for settling the conflict in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine in accordance with the Minsk agreements.

On 22 July 2020, the parties adopted the additional ceasefire-strengthening measures proposed by the authorities in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions (something that the Ukrainian side had been refusing to do for such a long time); these measures came into effect on 27 July 2020 and include a ban on offensive, reconnaissance and sabotage operations, a ban on the operation of any types of aerial vehicles, a ban on firing (including sniper fire), a ban on the deployment of heavy weapons in and around settlements, and the effective use of disciplinary actions for ceasefire violations. In late 2020 and early 2021, this made it

possible to significantly reduce the number of ceasefire violations and to minimize the number of civilian casualties.

That being said, it was not until eight months later, in April this year, that – following insistent requests by the authorities in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions and by Russia, including requests made within the “Normandy format” framework (at meetings of the advisers to the leaders of the Normandy Quartet countries) – the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine posted on its website the full text of the measures (without the numerous distortions that had been allowed to mar the text on previous occasions), which should ensure that Ukrainian military personnel comply with the arrangement whereby retaliatory fire may be opened only on the orders of the relevant leadership of the Ukrainian armed forces.

Despite a certain reduction in the intensity of ceasefire violations of late, civilian casualties continue to be recorded – chiefly in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions and due, *inter alia*, to the detonation of explosive devices deployed remotely by means of unmanned aerial vehicles and to direct shelling and shooting (including sniper fire) by the Ukrainian armed forces. Unfortunately, the tendency for civilian casualties to occur predominantly in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, as noted in the thematic report “Civilian Casualties in the Conflict-Affected Regions of Eastern Ukraine” (covering the period from 1 January 2017 to 15 September 2020), continues.

Here is some fresh information in that respect. As a result of the shelling of Horlikva (Donetsk region) on 28 August this year, a nine-year-old boy and a 12-year-old girl sustained injuries of various degrees. In this connection, one would like to hope that the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) will take the necessary steps to incorporate the aforementioned facts into its reports.

At the same time, as part of the policy of accelerated militarization of Ukraine supported by the United States of America and its NATO allies (no fewer than seven joint manoeuvres are scheduled to be held on Ukrainian territory in 2021 alone), the Ukrainian Government – its solemn assurances about striving for peace in Donbas notwithstanding – is intensifying the build-up of troops in the conflict zone. In so doing, it is demonstrating its lack of genuine interest in radical steps to minimize, let alone fully prevent ceasefire violations along the line of contact – something that would be facilitated by the establishment of direct co-operation with the authorities in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions aimed at averting such violations and investigating all incidents of that kind through the co-ordination mechanism agreed upon on 22 July 2020, namely the JCCC in its current setting, that is, with the involvement of the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk, as we and the authorities in certain areas of these regions constantly exhort the Ukrainian side to do.

Owing to the Ukrainian side’s refusal to consider the updated draft regulations for the TCG’s work (in which the views previously expressed on that score by all the parties had been taken into account) and draft minutes submitted by the representatives of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions at the last TCG meeting, a decision on this important matter could not be agreed on, yet that would have made it possible to remove the lingering uncertainty with regard to the tackling of key organizational aspects and would have increased the participants’ sense of responsibility for the fulfilment of their obligations.

In closing, I should like to wish Mr. Mikko Kinnunen success in his work as Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office and co-ordinator of the TCG, and to thank his predecessor, Ms. Heidi Grau, along with the Chief Monitor of the SMM and co-ordinator of the TCG’s Security Working Group, Mr. Yaşar Halit Çevik, and indeed all the co-ordinators (including those who have recently taken up their new duties) for their efforts to facilitate the quest by the authorities in Ukraine and certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions for ways of resolving the conflict in Donbas.

I also wish the participants a successful Conference.

I request that this statement be attached to the journal of today's special session of the Conference.

Thank you for your attention.