

The OSCE Secretariat bears no responsibility for the content of this document and circulates it without altering its content. The distribution by OSCE Conference Services of this document is without prejudice to OSCE decisions, as set out in documents agreed by OSCE participating States.

PC.DEL/1432/20  
23 October 2020

ENGLISH  
Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,  
AT THE 1286th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

22 October 2020

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

Mr. Chairperson,

The relative stabilization of the military situation near the line of contact in Donbas is, to all appearances, perceived by the Ukrainian leadership not as an occasion for stepping up efforts aimed at full implementation of the Minsk Package of Measures of 12 February 2015, but, rather, as a respite of sorts during which to strengthen its military capability, engage in militaristic rhetoric, propagate false narratives about “aggression” and “occupation”, and look for pretexts for rewriting the Minsk agreements.

On 15 October, in an interview with the Ukrainian media outlet Obozrevatel, the Deputy Secretary of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine and First Deputy Commander of the Special Operations Forces of the Ukrainian armed forces, Serhiy Kryvonos, pointed out that the latter were awaiting the right moment in the international political context to proceed with an offensive in Donbas. He added, in particular, that “the military are waiting for Mr. Zelenskyy to give the order to launch the offensive”. He also explained that offensive operations had been practised during the Ukrainian military’s recent exercise involving foreign partners. Moreover, in that very same interview, Colonel Kryvonos raised the sinister prospect of the leaders of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions being abducted or even liquidated.

No amount of progress on the ground can induce the Ukrainian authorities to abandon their inhumane methods of crushing dissent. These include both the ongoing socio-economic blockade of Donbas and the attempts to punish former Ukrainian citizens who made the conscious choice to take their destiny into their own hands after the February 2014 coup d’état in Ukraine and decided to reunite with Russia. They also include acts of sabotage against overhead power lines in the south of Ukraine (acts for which no one has as yet been held accountable) and the blocking of access to a water source, namely a canal that is used, among other things, to supply water to the civilian population.

All this is evidently meant to demonstrate that the Ukrainian Government intends to continue talking with the authorities in Donbas from a position of strength. The fresh round of military violence in the region was probably conceived as part of the notorious “plan B” that the Ukrainian leadership has on more than one occasion referred to as an alternative to the Minsk agreements.

Despite a significant reduction in the number of exchanges of fire in Donbas since 27 July, the date on which the measures to strengthen the ceasefire regime came into effect, ceasefire violations continue to be recorded there to this day. Ukrainian arms transfers, including transfers of heavy military hardware, continue to take place near the line of contact. The Ukrainian armed forces have traditionally been using railway stations for logistic purposes and are hampering efforts to detect arms transfers.

For example, on 16 October, a mini-drone belonging to the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) was subjected to strong signal interference near Rubizhne station in the Luhansk region, as a result of which the Mission lost control of the drone. The machine was returned to the monitors afterwards by the Ukrainian military. Significantly, the day before, a surface-to-air missile system of the Strela-10 type had been spotted there by the SMM using a drone. Also on 16 October, four heavy large-calibre (152 mm) howitzers of the Msta-S type were discovered at Pokrovsk station in the Donetsk region.

We call on the Mission to intensify its observation of railway junctions near the line of contact (also by means of monitoring equipment), which are being used by the Ukrainian armed forces to transfer and redeploy heavy weapons. We are aware that the SMM is currently faced with problems arising from the coronavirus epidemic. We hope that these difficulties can soon be overcome.

Following the changes in the Ukrainian leadership in 2019, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy set a deadline of one year for putting an end to the war in the east of Ukraine and securing peace in Donbas in the long term. It was stressed several times that the Minsk agreements were the only possible way of arriving at a political and diplomatic settlement of the crisis. This position was reiterated by the Ukrainian President during the “Normandy format” summit held in Paris on 9 December 2019.

Yet, this self-declared adherence to the Minsk Package of Measures notwithstanding, both President Zelenskyy and the Ukrainian representatives in the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) have been regularly calling since the start of the year for the sequence of steps in the settlement process stipulated in that document to be revised. Among other things, they are insisting on the need for military control over the territory of certain areas of Donbas to be established before the start of any political settlement. Such an approach runs counter to the letter of the Package of Measures and to the understanding reached at all levels of the “Normandy format” that political and security issues must be resolved in a closely integrated manner.

Referring to the situation in Donbas during his recent address to the Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian Parliament) on 20 October, President Zelenskyy did not once mention the existence of the Minsk agreements or the TCG. On the other hand, he emphasized that Ukraine’s defence budget had been increased significantly since the start of his presidency. As he put it, in 2020 Ukraine had the largest defence budget in all its history (totalling over 4 billion US dollars), and there were no plans to reduce it. His points of emphasis are most revealing.

The attempts by Ukrainian representatives to belittle the TCG’s significance in the settlement process are utterly unacceptable. In Kyiv it is constantly being claimed that the TCG is merely an auxiliary mechanism, in which key decisions cannot be worked out. That, so it is argued, is what the “Normandy format” is for. To cite one example: on 19 October, in an interview with the Ukrainian media outlet *Dzerkalo Tyzhnia* (Mirror of the Week), the deputy head of the Ukrainian delegation to the TCG, Oleksiy Reznikov, who is also Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Reintegration, asserted that “Minsk [i.e., the Minsk Package of Measures] is not a platform upon which peace can be built”. As for the TCG, that was in his words no more than “a banal logistic platform for consultations”.

But it is precisely the TCG and its four working groups that, in accordance with the Package of Measures, provide the representatives of the Ukrainian Government and of the authorities in Donetsk and

Luhansk with a dialogue platform for the practical implementation of the Minsk agreements. It is precisely there that the fundamental work on agreeing on decisions regarding political, security, humanitarian and socio-economic issues must be performed. Another important factor is that at the TCG the representatives of the Ukrainian Government and of Donbas as parties to the internal Ukrainian conflict have the opportunity to engage in direct dialogue on all aspects of the settlement.

Incidentally, according to Mr. Reznikov's interpretation, the meetings in Minsk from the very outset took place without the Ukrainian Government having recognized the representatives of certain areas of Donbas as full participants in the negotiation process. It would seem, then, that what took place was a mere simulacrum of dialogue. In the minutes of the TCG meeting on 11 March of this year the Ukrainian negotiators finally acknowledged the representatives of certain areas of Donbas as authorized representatives and pledged to intensify discussions with them on the political and legal aspects of the settlement process. However, today we are hearing arguments from the Ukrainian Government to the effect that these very representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk are – yet again – not to its liking, and that there will be no substantive dialogue with them. What is more, Mr. Reznikov, elaborating his idea about so-called transitional justice, threatened them with prosecution as alleged “war criminals”.

In addition, this Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister launched into a discourse on the utility of concluding other agreements (say, “Stockholm agreements”) to replace the Minsk agreements, which in his view were not functioning. All this accompanied by claims on his part that the Package of Measures can only be preserved if it is “modernized”. How is one to assess this? Surely as a refusal to adhere to the letter of that document, which was endorsed by United Nations Security Council resolution 2202, and as a way of preparing the Ukrainian Government's exit from a negotiation process based on the Minsk agreements?

We have drawn attention many times to an intensification of the Ukrainian authorities' attempts to determine the fate of certain areas of Donbas without taking into account the opinion of its inhabitants and authorized representatives. A relevant example is a public opinion survey to be conducted at polling stations on the day of the forthcoming local elections, 25 October, regarding whether or not it would be appropriate to grant special economic conditions to Donbas. It is telling that this survey will not cover the territory of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions or adjacent areas on the other side of the line of contact, for the Ukrainian authorities have decided that polling stations will not be opened there. Significantly, it has been announced that the results of the survey will have a binding, as opposed to recommendatory, nature, and that they will translate into concrete decisions by the Ukrainian authorities. Once again it has been decided in Kyiv that the inhabitants of Donbas are themselves not to have any say whatsoever in the future of their region.

Against this backdrop, the NATO States are simply stoking up the bellicose aspirations of the Ukrainian leadership. They continue to train the Ukrainian army and equip it with weapons, effectively inciting it to further violence against the inhabitants of Donbas. In October the Ukrainian Government signed agreements on stepping up military co-operation with Turkey and the United Kingdom. According to comments by Ukrainian officials, one of the things thereby achieved is an arrangement for the supply of offensive arms, including modern combat drones, to Ukraine.

We continue to urge the OSCE and Ukraine's external “minders” to bring maximum influence to bear on the country's leadership so as to rule out the logic of war and induce it to act in the interests of peace and civil accord with a view to achieving swift 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.