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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1096th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

14 April 2016

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

Mr. Chairperson,

The situation in Donbas remains tense. We continue to record the use of heavy weapons by the Ukrainian security forces, which have no intention of returning to their previous positions.

Over the past week, the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) has provided information about the latest consequences of the “indiscriminate” shelling of militia-controlled towns and villages by the Ukrainian armed forces. A residential building was destroyed in Holmivskiyi (Donetsk region) when it was hit by a mortar from a northerly direction, where Ukrainian security forces are stationed. Shell craters were discovered several metres from the local polyclinic. In Zaichenko (Donetsk region), a house sustained serious damage as a result of mortar fire from a westerly direction, i.e., from Ukrainian positions. A large amount of artillery fire was recorded on the outskirts of Donetsk, as were shell craters from an attack on a Luhansk militia checkpoint in Pervomaisk from a north-westerly direction.

Monitors have reported that Ukrainian military equipment, which is subject to withdrawal under the Minsk Package of Measures and its Addendum, is presently in the security zone: 3 anti-tank guns were discovered in Kremenivka, 6 howitzers in Novoaidar, 1 howitzer in Zelenyi Hai, 1 tank in Kirove, 10 tanks in Pravdivka, 12 anti-tank guns in Zhelanne and Novozhelanne, 6 guns in Mykolaivka, 1 anti-tank gun in Pervomaisk and 10 tanks in Avdiivka. Monitors recorded live-fire exercises by the Ukrainian armed forces near the line of contact in the village of Zelenyi Hai on 11 April 2016.

The results of verification work carried out at Ukrainian armed forces’ weapons storage sites between 7 and 11 April indicated that 44 guns of less than 100 mm in calibre, 29 mortars and 48 tanks were missing.

Some colleagues are trying to argue that the Ukrainian Government is not responsible for this escalation, quoting Alexander Hug, the Principal Deputy Chief Monitor of the SMM, who said that there are no “grey” or neutral zones. It has also been claimed that the Ukrainian army can do whatever it wants on Ukrainian territory and occupy any areas of territory. In this context the question arises whether the same approach will also be taken to the idea broached here of establishing demilitarized sections on the line of contact. Let me be more precise: is this kind of demilitarization in fact unilateral, i.e., binding for militia units but not for the Ukrainian Government?

A number of partners are trying to convince themselves that the current authorities in Kyiv are the victims and thus they can expect leniency. Try telling that to the residents of Donbas, who bore the brunt of a punitive operation launched two years ago, or those who were burned alive in Odessa, others who were bombed by the air force in Luhansk or those whose women and children were killed by artillery fire on the streets of Sloviansk, Donetsk, Horlivka, Luhansk, Stanytsia Luhanska and other towns and cities in Donbas. We are convinced that you will not convince them. No matter how many hampers of biscuits you offer to those who still live in Donbas.

We once again stress that shielding the authorities in Kyiv puts the brakes on the negotiating process and provokes an escalation of the conflict.

Direct dialogue between the Ukrainian Government, Donetsk and Luhansk on all aspects of a settlement is still the only way to make headway.

Real agreements are needed in the subgroup on security issues, primarily on the ceasefire and withdrawal of heavy weapons, but also on mine clearance and the ending of live-fire exercises near the line of contact. These agreements must be implemented by both parties. We call for more active patrolling by the SMM monitors at the security zone and the most problematic sections of the line of contact. There needs to be proper mirror monitoring. So far, we have been unable to confirm this. The monitors’ safety remains one of the key priorities. We consider threats against them to be unacceptable.

A significant contribution to de-escalating the situation could be to normalize the work of the Joint Centre for Control and Co-ordination (JCCC). To this end, working contacts between JCCC military experts need to be restored and militia representatives should be fully involved in the Centre’s activities. We note that the Ukrainians have been involved in a number of incidents provoking the Russian representatives. We regard these actions as measures aimed at disrupting the JCCC mechanism, against the backdrop of statements regarding the importance of preserving it as a stabilizing factor.

The pace of talks on political matters, especially on the modalities for local elections, needs to pick up. At the last meeting of the subgroup on political issues on 6 April, additional proposals in line with OSCE electoral standards were submitted. We are hoping that there will be a constructive response.

The humanitarian situation in Donbas remains tense. We see no intention on the part of the Ukrainian Government even to try to win back the sympathies of the residents of Donbas through peaceful and humane means. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), the Ukrainian authorities have suspended or completely cancelled the payment of social benefits to over 600,000 internally displaced

persons and have also frozen the payment of pensions to more than 370,000 residents of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions.

The continued blockade of Donbas is doing nothing to help normalize the situation. Until the blockade is lifted, it is necessary to open as many checkpoints as possible on the line of contact. It is important to do this within the framework of dialogue and to be guided primarily by the safety and security of the local residents. In particular, this means choosing areas where there is the least risk of landmines.

The exchange of detainees according to the principle of “all for all” still needs to be settled. A considerable number of people have been detained in connection with the events in south-eastern Ukraine, not only in the conflict zone but also Kharkiv, Odessa, Dnipropetrovsk, Kyiv and other parts of Ukraine. We are not receiving reliable information from Ukraine about the fate of Russian citizens who went to visit relatives and then disappeared. We cannot rule out that they have been arrested by the security services in violation of the due process of law and are being detained without the right to written communication with others or to notify anyone of their whereabouts (incommunicado, as they say).

As for “domestic separatism”, let me remind you that there are posters all over the country explaining who needs to be handed over to Ukraine’s political police. Even those who campaign against the military draft are regarded as separatists. Other charges include: “desecrating the values of the Ukrainian people; questioning the legitimacy of the Ukrainian nation; spreading rumours about non-existent threats to the Russian language; instilling fear and panic; praising the Donetsk People’s Republic and the Luhansk People’s Republic”. Such is the interpretation of Article 110 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine, which provides for punishment of up to 12 years of deprivation of liberty.

All of this could have been dismissed as “freedom of expression in a civil society” if it had not been for the case of Ruslan Kotsaba who was arrested on those very charges.

So-called separatism is also a tool for internal political wrangling in Ukraine. The statement of the current Governor of the Odessa region, Mikheil Saakashvili, in which he brands the region’s prosecutor general and the mayor of Odessa as separatists, caught people’s attention.

While we are talking about Odessa, the recent clashes there between people who came to mark the anniversary of the city’s liberation from the Nazi occupiers and neo-Nazis are further proof of how acute the problem of aggressive nationalism is. As the Deputy Chief Monitor of the SMM, Alešxa Simkić, said yesterday, alarming tendencies of this kind are spreading across Europe. This means that the issue should receive all the more attention in the OSCE. Active and urgent measures to counter this problem would undoubtedly help to stabilize the situation in the country and would unlock additional opportunities for accord and reconciliation in Ukraine.

We again urge the SMM not to limit itself to monitoring the human rights situation in Donbas, but to keep an eye on what is happening in areas controlled by the Ukrainian Government as well.

In conclusion, we hope that the current turbulence in the upper echelons of power in Ukraine will not lead to attempts to use the situation in Donbas to achieve political goals and will not provoke further escalation.

On the contrary, we trust that the new Ukrainian Government will finally begin implementing the Minsk agreements in earnest and abandon its attempts to drag out the talks and provoke tensions.

Thank you for your attention.