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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1272nd MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

18 June 2020

On the report of the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine

Mr. Chairperson,

We thank Mr. Henrik Villadsen for his report. Given the protracted nature of the crisis in eastern Ukraine caused by the continuing military operations of the Ukrainian Government against Donbas and also a series of critical humanitarian problems, the OSCE structures need to pay close attention to what is happening in that country.

The present leadership of Ukraine has taken over the baton of discrimination against its own citizens from the former authorities of the Poroshenko era. On the pretext of defending the State language, laws have been adopted on education and on supporting the functioning of the Ukrainian language as the State language. The Law on Full General Secondary Education was signed by President Zelenskyi on 13 March. These laws significantly infringe on the linguistic and educational rights of Russian-speaking inhabitants of the country and of members of national minorities and consolidate the policy of forced Ukrainization. International bodies have clearly pointed this out.

On 9 December 2019, the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe published its opinion on the Law on Supporting the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language and concluded that in the absence of a specific law on the protection and use of minority languages, the current legal framework does not provide sufficient guarantees for the linguistic rights of these population groups. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) called on the Cabinet of Ministers and the Verkhovna Rada to draft a law on the exercise of the language rights of members of national minorities without undue delay and on the basis of broad, inclusive consultations with them. There has been no progress on this issue to date.

The situation in education is no better. On 16 January, the Ukrainian Parliament adopted a law on general secondary education. Here too, the OHCHR clearly pointed out that the legislation provided insufficient guarantees for the protection and use of minority languages. Previously, the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe had expressed concern that the law on education gave European Union languages preferential treatment over other minority languages.

We call on the Co-ordinator to work more actively with the Ukrainian authorities and urge them to bring the country's legal framework into line with Ukraine's OSCE commitments. There is a need for close collaboration between the Co-ordinator and the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and for efforts to facilitate dialogue between the authorities and ethnic and linguistic groups living in Ukraine to address these issues. Special attention should be paid to preventing the introduction of punitive practices in the language environment.

The report states that the Office of the Co-ordinator assisted in the work of the Law Reform Commission established in July 2019, particularly during the final stage of considerations of the working groups on amendments to the Constitution of Ukraine regarding decentralization. However, the ongoing administrative and territorial reform in the country has prompted negative reactions from the Hungarian and Bulgarian minorities, who have spoken about the desire of the Ukrainian Government to adjust administrative borders within the regions for opportunistic political reasons without taking into account the opinions of the minorities. Concerns in this regard have also been raised by Hungary and Bulgaria themselves. All this proves once again that promoting dialogue between the authorities and national minorities on this and other subjects should remain among the Co-ordinator's priorities.

In connection with criminal justice reform in Ukraine, it is important to encourage the Ukrainian authorities to carry out an effective investigation of high-profile crimes – the murders on the Maidan and on 2 May 2014 in Odessa, and the attacks on human rights defenders, activists and reporters. As the OHCHR pointed out in its recent report on the human rights situation in Ukraine, impunity remains pervasive in these cases. The Council of Europe International Advisory Panel on Ukraine has also expressed its concern about the progress of the investigation.

We are counting on you, Mr. Villadsen, to work actively to rectify the critical state of press freedom in Ukraine. The draft law on the media under consideration by the Verkhovna Rada requires significant revision. The Co-ordinator needs to work closely with the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media to prevent the further consolidation in law of political censorship.

The report states that great attention is being paid to co-operation with the Ukrainian authorities on demining. To judge by the reports of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, whose monitors spotted boxes of MON-90 anti-personnel mines at a checkpoint of the Ukrainian armed forces in the Luhansk region on 24 April, there is still much work to be done. At the moment, the formal adherence by Ukraine to the 1997 Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction does not prevent the Ukrainian armed forces from using them in practice. It is worth recalling that the Parties to the Convention have repeatedly noted Ukraine's non-compliance with its mine destruction obligations. We trust that the Co-ordinator will give special attention to this question.

We hope that the Co-ordinator's activities, including extrabudgetary ones, will be guided by the principles of openness and accountability and will be in line with the principles agreed to by all 57 participating States. The projects carried out with the Co-ordinator's participation should take account of the legal rights and interests of all citizens of Ukraine, regardless of the region they live in or of their national, linguistic, cultural or religious affiliations.

In conclusion, we should like to wish you, Mr. Villadsen, every success in your future work.

Thank you for your attention.