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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1213th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

24 January 2019

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

Mr. Chairperson,

Despite the New Year/Christmas truce, the Ukrainian Government continues to provoke military tension in Donbas, stepping up its military activity near the line of contact.

The ceasefire regime is regularly violated. The area around Donetsk, Yasynuvata and Avdiivka, the outskirts of Svitlodarsk and the area for the disengagement of forces and hardware in Zolote remain the tensest places. Between 16 and 22 January, the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) spotted 87 units of Ukrainian heavy weaponry deployed in violation of the Package of Measures and 99 units immediately behind the withdrawal lines. The Ukrainian armed forces are moving tube, missile and rocket artillery closer to the line of contact, including heavy 152 mm Akatsiya howitzers and 122 mm Gvozdika and Lyagushka howitzers. The arrival and unloading of trains carrying military equipment was also reported in Kostiantynivka and Bakhmut (Artemivsk) in the Donetsk region.

The Ukrainian armed forces continue to train for offensive operations. During combined forces military exercises on 20 January near Mariupol, an assault unit practised seizing new territory with cover provided by attack helicopters.

The Ukrainian side persists in its provocations near civilian infrastructure facilities. After Voda Donbasa employees who were safeguarding the operation of the Donetsk filtration station came under fire on 10 January in the village of Kruta Balka, two civilian cars parked near the Vasylivka pumping station were fired at on 17 January. In the early hours of 23 January, the Vasylivka pumping station itself came under fire, resulting in damage to the entrance area and the chlorination and accumulator buildings. Its staff were forced to take shelter. I might add that five filtration stations providing water to 1.3 million people on both sides of the line of contact are connected to this station. For the third time in the past four weeks, a functioning school in Zolote-5 came under fire from Ukrainian security forces' positions. Luckily, none of the children were injured.

Not only effective monitoring but also measures to oversee and strengthen the ceasefire, including a mechanism to ensure that disciplinary measures are taken against those who violate the ceasefire regime, are needed to prevent further escalation. This is a matter of urgency, as is the need to publish orders banning the use of weapons. The SMM has reported that some Ukrainian soldiers were not even aware that a truce had begun. The rapid agreement and written confirmation of additional security guarantees near civilian infrastructure facilities are particularly important. Unfortunately, no progress could be made in these matters at the Trilateral Contact Group meeting in Minsk on 17 January owing to the position taken by the Ukrainian Government.

The Ukrainian side continues to sabotage the implementation of the Framework Decision of 21 September 2016 on Disengagement of Forces and Hardware. The Ukrainian armed forces are undermining the “silence regime” and strengthening their positions inside the disengagement area in Zolote. There is no progress in Petrivske either, where there has been repeated shooting since the start of the New Year truce. The Ukrainian armed forces stubbornly refuse to begin disengagement in Stanytsia Luhanska, where, according to the SMM, the necessary conditions for this have been observed since December of last year.

The Ukrainian Government’s actions are preventing the situation at the line of contact from being stabilized. All of this also has a negative impact on the situation at the crossing points, as a result of which it is mainly the elderly population that suffers. During the past week, three people died while trying to cross the line of contact, two of them elderly men who died within three days of each other (18 and 21 January) immediately after passing through the Ukrainian armed forces’ checkpoint in Stanytsia Luhanska.

The Ukrainian Government is also wilfully derailing the possibility of a political settlement of the crisis in accordance with the Minsk Package of Measures. Amendments to the Constitution concerning decentralization have been postponed indefinitely. The law on amnesty for persons involved in the events in Donbas has not entered into force. Contrary to the provisions of the Package of Measures, Ukraine has still not made the law on the special status of Donbas permanent (it expires on 31 December this year). Furthermore, in the heated climate ahead of the election, the President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko declared on 22 January that “no special status” would be granted in Ukraine. How does this tally with Ukraine’s obligations under the Minsk agreements?

Almost all of the steps by the Ukrainian leadership are now determined by pre-election rhetoric and the desire to retain the sympathies of radical nationalists, who have in fact become the backbone of the current regime. The fomenting of tension in society, pressure on any dissent, the “cleansing” of the information space, interference in church affairs and the suppression of the Russian language continue.

Human rights defenders also note an alarming trend. The new annual report by Human Rights Watch records a deterioration in the human rights situation in Ukraine. There are rampaging radical nationalists that the authorities in Kyiv cannot or do not want to control, discrimination against the residents of Donbas, including the negative socio-economic consequences of the blockade imposed on the region by the Ukrainian Government, and harassment of journalists. No progress has been made in the investigation of high-profile crimes. Human rights defenders say that those responsible for the deaths of people in Odessa in May 2014 have in fact escaped responsibility.

For example, on 17 January, when the Kherson court decided to extend the period of detention for the head of the RIA Novosti Ukraine news portal, Kirill Vyshinsky, until 16 February, the apartment and offices of his lawyer Andrey Domansky were searched. This went on the next day as well and was clearly designed to intimidate the Russian citizen's lawyer. Also in Kherson, the office of the local newspaper *Noviy Den* came under fire on 18 January. I might add that the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Mr. Harlem Désir, has already commented on this.

The provocations surrounding the Ukrainian Orthodox Church show no sign of stopping. The unprecedented legislative assault on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is backed up by pressure on its clergy and parishioners. Through their actions, the Ukrainian authorities are violating a host of commitments under international law, including those within the OSCE. Domestic legislation is also being disregarded, in particular Article 35 of the Constitution, which rules out the possibility of State interference in church affairs or the granting of any privileges to a particular religious association.

On 17 January, the Verkhovna Rada adopted the latest amendments to the Ukrainian law on freedom of conscience and religious organizations. These changes create a legal framework for the large-scale revision of the property rights of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. The extremely vague wording of the law establishes a basis for new religious conflicts and the violent seizure of churches and their property. Against this background, fired-up radicals attacked the Saviour Transfiguration Cathedral of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Sumy on 18 January. They threw a pyrotechnic device inside, and the evening service had to be interrupted because of the resulting explosion.

The wave of attacks in the country on parishes of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church continues. In each case the procedure is the same. At a meeting, often with the involvement of the local authorities, a decision is taken to “transfer” a church, and then an aggressive mob seizes the church building. For example, on 16 January, an aggressive mob, together with the head of the local administration, broke down the doors of a Ukrainian Orthodox church in Shandrovets in the Lviv region and forced the priest to leave. In the early hours of the 19 January, during the Orthodox holiday of Epiphany, the archpriest of the Holy Trinity Church in the village of Roztoky in the Ternopil region was prevented from conducting the service. On the same day, in the village of Brailiv in the Vinnytsia region, the head of the local administration tried to prevent the ceremony of lighting candles at the baptismal font, which was performed by the archpriest of the Brailiv parish of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. On 21 January, a church building of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church was seized in the village of Bronnytsya in the Volyn region. On the same day, in the village of Vesele in the Luhansk region armed members of one of the Ukrainian radical political forces attempted to “help” transfer a church community to the new church structure.

Mr. Chairperson,

Today, it is absolutely clear that the Minsk agreements were necessary for the Ukrainian Government only to obtain a tactical “respite”, shore up its military capacity and resolve political problems of the moment. In fact, under the guise of imagined “Russian aggression”, the Ukrainian Government is moving further away from the prospect of a peaceful settlement of the crisis.

Despite the counter-productive policy of Ukraine, we take the position that the Minsk Package of Measures of 12 February 2015, endorsed by United Nations Security Council resolution 2202, remains the only framework for a settlement. Without the political will of the Ukrainian leadership, there will be no progress in the settlement. We need to ensure that Ukraine fulfils its obligations regarding the ceasefire, synchronizes the resolution of security issues with progress on the political track and strictly implements all the provisions of the Minsk Package of Measures in a full and co-ordinated manner.

Thank you for your attention.