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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1187th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

31 May 2018

**Regarding the discussion of the work of the OSCE observers at the
Russian checkpoints of Gukovo and Donetsk**

Mr. Varga,

We welcome you to this meeting of the Permanent Council and thank you for your detailed report. We appreciate your work as the head of the Observer Mission. We note the informative reports by the Mission drawn up in strict compliance with its mandate and reflecting the real situation at the two checkpoints on the Russian-Ukrainian border.

In connection with the statements we have heard, we should like once again to recall that the presence of OSCE observers on Russian territory is a gesture of goodwill as a consequence of the Berlin Declaration by the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Russia, Germany, France and Ukraine of 2 July 2014. At a time of military activity close to our borders and in the absence of mechanisms for settling the conflict within Ukraine, Russia took this unprecedented step as a way of increasing trust. Incidentally, we originally offered to allow OSCE observers at three Russian checkpoints, but this was opposed by Ukraine. In view of the position taken by the Minister for Foreign Affairs Pavlo Klimkin, consensus was possible only regarding the two border crossings at Gukovo and Donetsk.

Almost four years have elapsed since then. Agreements have been adopted to settle the Ukrainian conflict. United Nations Security Council resolution 2202 approved the Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements. Neither that nor any other documents mention an obligation to post observers along the entire length of the Russian-Ukrainian border or to place the border under international control. Point 9 of the Package of Measures provides for the “reinstatement of full control of the State border by the Government of Ukraine throughout the conflict area, starting on day one after the local elections and ending after the comprehensive political settlement.”

Turning to the work of the Observer Mission, we note the calm situation confirmed by it at the Gukovo and Donetsk checkpoints, the absence of movements of arms or military equipment across the border, or any threats to security.

The observers note the high volume of passenger and transport flows through the Gukovo and Donetsk checkpoints, which handle a considerable amount of transborder activity. In the period under review alone (from 1 February to 15 May) around 1 million people passed through the two checkpoints. As many as 10,000 people and 1,500 vehicles cross the Donetsk checkpoint every day, and up to 3,500 people and 950 vehicles the Gukovo checkpoint. Every week, families with large amounts of luggage cross the border, Ukrainian refugees taken in by Russia. According to the OSCE observers, most of the people enter Russia to buy medicine and other supplies or to withdraw money. This confirms the serious humanitarian situation in Donbas as a result of the trade and transport blockade introduced by the Government in Kyiv.

Russia is not indifferent to the fate of the civilian population of Ukraine. We regularly send humanitarian convoys to Donbas with food, medicine, children's toys, schoolbooks and other vital necessities. Our attempts to do this through the checkpoints controlled by the Ukrainian Government have been obstructed by the Ukrainian authorities. Humanitarian convoys are now passing through the Donetsk and Matveev Kurgan checkpoints, where we have admitted Ukrainian border guards and customs officials. They inspect the Russian humanitarian convoys together with their Russian colleagues. This is confirmed by the observers. We always inform the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre in advance of the arrival of humanitarian convoys and their contents.

Attempts by certain participating States to tell Russian border guards, customs officials and OSCE observers how they should conduct themselves on the territory of the Russian Federation are unacceptable. A special border security regime is in operation at the Gukovo and Donetsk checkpoints. The area in which the observers can operate is determined in view of the safety requirements to be observed and taking account of the large volume of transport and passenger flows across the border. The observers should not hinder the work of the Russian customs officials and border guards or obstruct the movement of people or vehicles across the border. I repeat that the presence of OSCE staff at the two Russian checkpoints is a voluntary confidence-building measure and not a control mechanism, as many attempt to present it.

Mr. Chairperson,

At Ukraine's urging, another politicized discussion was organized yesterday on the possibility of "improving transparency" at the border. This senseless exercise merely casts doubts on the utility of the unilateral Russian confidence-building measures. Picking out individual provisions of the Minsk Package of Measures for their politicized discussion is extremely counter-productive.

We would like the OSCE Observer Mission at the two checkpoints on the Russian-Ukrainian border to be able to work effectively and are ensuring all the necessary conditions for this. At the request of the distinguished Ambassador Varga and to minimize expenses, the mandate has now been extended for four months. In order for the observers to enjoy privileges and immunities in view of the fact that the OSCE does not have a legal personality, we emphatically request that the members of the Mission be accredited by the embassies of the States sending them. We welcome Hungary's decision to grant accreditation to Ambassador Varga. He was received in Moscow on 11 May by Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs Alexander Grushko. Close co-operation has been established between the Mission and the office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rostov-on-Don, the local

authorities and the relevant Russian departments. Rosgranstroy has carried out extensive repairs to the premises, for which, as we decided, the OSCE does not pay rent and communal charges. The observers have medical supplies at their disposal and are offered rapid and safe transport between the checkpoints and the office in Kamensk-Shakhtinsky.

In conclusion, allow me to thank Mr. Varga for his work in strict compliance with his mandate and the sentiments of the host country.

Thank you for your attention.