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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
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AT THE 1212th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

17 January 2019

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

Mr. Chairperson,

The start of the new year 2019 has not brought any significant improvement in the situation in Ukraine. The Ukrainian leadership has proved unable to refrain from armed provocations in Donbas or measures that result in a further deterioration of the situation across the country.

The New Year/Christmas ceasefire declared in Donbas is not being fully respected. It has helped to reduce the number of skirmishes but has not led to “complete silence”. It would appear that the Ukrainian Government had and still has no intention of observing the ceasefire. This is confirmed by the observations made by the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) – within a day of the announcement of the ceasefire, some Ukrainian soldiers admitted to the Mission that they had not even received any such orders. During the first day of the ceasefire 162 violations were recorded. The shelling did not even stop on the eve of the peaceful holiday of Orthodox Christmas. On 16 January, company tactical exercises involving live firing were carried out by a mechanized unit of the 17th Separate Tank Brigade (Kryvyi Rih, Zaporizhia region), during which offensive operations were practised.

The Ukrainian Government has persistently paid no heed to the disengagement of forces and hardware in Stanytsia Luhanska. There have been renewed skirmishes in the Petrivske and Zolote disengagement areas, where the Ukrainian armed forces have strengthened their positions. SMM unmanned aerial vehicles have come under fire on three occasions – on 10 January near Popasna, and on 12 and 14 January near the village of Chermalyk.

The situation surrounding the Donetsk filtration station has remained extremely worrying. On 10 January, employees of the Voda Donbasa company came under fire near the village of Kruta Balka, and three men were injured. There are attempts to paralyse the work of public utilities and create the prerequisites for a humanitarian disaster. No less alarming is

the situation at the sluice gate of the Myronivskiy reservoir in the Donetsk region, which is controlled by the Ukrainian armed forces, where on 13 January SMM monitors discovered two boxes (with wires connected) attached to the metal gates of the sluice. A Ukrainian soldier confirmed to the SMM the presence of explosives at the sluice, which may indicate the preparation of sabotage. The parties should agree immediately in the Trilateral Contact Group on additional measures for de-escalation, notably near civilian infrastructure facilities, including a ban on any sabotage activities.

During the past three weeks alone, four civilians have been injured in Donbas as a result of shelling by the Ukrainian armed forces. The Ukrainian security forces are deliberately causing new victims and destruction on both sides of the line of contact. They are deploying weapons near civilian facilities. For example, on two occasions the SMM spotted an Osa surface-to-air missile system in the courtyard of a residential building in the village of Klynove, which is controlled by the Ukrainian armed forces, in the Bakhmut district of the Donetsk region. We expect the SMM to keep a systematic record of civilian casualties and destruction of civilian infrastructure and to publish this information in a corresponding thematic report.

Martial law has proved to be a dangerous toy in the hands of the Kyiv authorities ahead of the election. The rousing militant rhetoric continued even after the formal end of martial law. In late December, Yuriy Biryukov, adviser to the President of Ukraine, reported that almost the entire territory of the “grey zone” was occupied by the Ukrainian security forces.

Instead of promoting national dialogue, the leadership of Ukraine continues to polarize society. With increasing persistency, it is trying to divide Ukrainians into the “right” and “wrong” kind according to their attitude towards history, language and religion. It seeks to reformat the consciousness of the Ukrainian people at any price, changing their identity and replacing their values. It has adopted a course of complete historical revisionism, whitewashing and glorifying Nazi criminals and collaborators, and pandering to contemporary manifestations of xenophobia and neo-Nazism.

At the end of December, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine officially included the birthday of the Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera (1 January) in the calendar of public holidays. The local councils of the Lviv and Zhytomyr regions and also the city of Ternopil decided to declare 2019 the “year of Stepan Bandera”. The Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science decided to remove all references in history textbooks to collaboration with the Nazis on the part of Roman Shukhevych and Ukrainian national military formations. They are, as you know, remembered for their brutality towards the Jewish, Polish, Russian and Ukrainian civilian population during the Second World War. It is not surprising that for four years in a row Ukraine has voted in the United Nations General Assembly against the resolution on combating the glorification of Nazism.

On 1 January, militarized radicals solemnly marched along the central streets of Kyiv and other cities, promising to establish “Ukrainian order”. I might add that we consider it inappropriate for the SMM to refer to the torchlit processions involving neo-Nazi slogans as “peaceful assemblies” in its report. We recall the need to publish a thematic report by the SMM on manifestations of aggressive nationalism, neo-Nazism and xenophobia in Ukraine.

The UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine also mentioned this problem. In its 24th report on the human rights situation in that country, it notes an increase in radical and extremist attitudes in Ukrainian society, and attacks on journalists, civil activists and members of the opposition. According to the Mission, many of these acts of violence were carried out with the complicity of the official authorities and law enforcement officers, or remained unpunished, even despite extremists publicly admitting their involvement in these crimes. The radicals are clearly working together with the authorities. Suffice it to recall in this connection the work of various kinds of resources specialized in searching for “Kremlin agents”. Recently, the posting of personal details about the Austrian journalist Christian Wehrschütz coincided surprisingly with the Ukrainian Government’s refusal to provide him with accreditation for working in Donbas.

It is clear that the Ukrainian Government is trying to hide a lot from journalists. The material by Marc Bennetts in *The Times*, where he talks about members of Ukrainian nationalist battalions at the line of contact, deserves particular mention in this context. Among them, he met those who admitted that they had undergone specialist training at Islamic State camps in Syria and Iraq.

Many journalists who have displeased the Ukrainian Government remain behind bars. One such example is the head of the RIA Novosti Ukraine news portal, Russian citizen Kirill Vyshinsky, who was arrested in May of last year on trumped-up charges.

The Ukrainian law enforcement system is becoming established as an instrument of repression for muzzling dissent. This also manifests itself in the lack of progress in the investigation of high-profile crimes, such as the shootings on the Maidan in Kyiv and the burning of people in Odessa in 2014. However, the Ukrainian leadership now seems much more concerned about the forthcoming election and the task of staying in power. Evidently, the authorities in Kyiv have decided to take a “no holds barred” approach in this battle.

They are doing everything possible to prevent Ukrainian citizens who are critical of the current authorities from voting. The Ukrainian Central Election Commission has decided not to open polling stations at the Ukrainian embassy and consulates general in Russia. This decision, along with the infringement of the electoral rights of internally displaced persons, has obvious political goals. Let me remind you that, according to official statistics, there are currently some 2.5 million Ukrainians living in Russia, more than a million of whom are refugees from Donbas.

There is no end to the pre-election acrobatics of the Ukrainian authorities. Using the slogan of the struggle for independence as a pretext, they are for opportunistic political purposes blatantly meddling in the affairs of the leading Church, encouraging a divide in Ukrainian orthodoxy. These actions violate many of Ukraine’s human rights commitments, including those within the OSCE. Unprecedented pressure continues on the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church. High-ranking secular officials are actively lobbying to legalize a split in the Church. It is significant that they are giving political speeches in places of worship created for prayer.

The Ukrainian authorities are preparing a normative framework to revise the property rights of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in favour of the church structure they have created. There is an increased risk not only of repressive decisions by the judicial system in this regard, but also of attempts to seize church buildings by force. More than 40 Ukrainian

Orthodox Church parishes were seized during the period from 2014 to 2016. The number of provocations against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has increased dramatically since the end of last year. In mid-December there were arson attacks in the Kyiv region on the Church of the Archangel Michael in Bila Tserkva and the Church of the Holy Trinity in Rzhyshev. There were attacks on churches in the village of Semenivka in the Bilhorod-Dnistrovsky district of the Odessa region (26 December) and in the village of Vesele in the Vesele district of the Zaporizhia region (4 January). In Lviv, vandals scrawled provocative slogans on the façade of St. Vladimir's Church and also on the fence of St. George's Cathedral (13 January) and posted pictures of their actions on social media. Likewise, the handwriting of vandals was also to be seen in Sumy – the fence of the Saviour Transfiguration Cathedral was daubed with paint and various graffiti (15 January).

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church and its clergy are being intimidated by attacks carried out by right-wing radical groups, including Right Sector and C14. On Christmas Eve radicals attempted to block access to cathedrals and churches of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Vinnytsia, Chernihiv, Boryspil, Khmelnytskyi, Kamianets-Podilskyi, Poltava, Lviv, Sumy, Ternopil, Rivne and Odessa.

New parishes have been seized. On 13 January, proponents of the new church structure, with the support of nationalists from the Svoboda paramilitary security forces, took possession of three churches of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – St. Michael's Church in the village of Krasnovolya in the Volyn region, the Church of the Great Martyr St. Demetrius of Solun in the village of Puzhaykovo in the Odessa region, and St. Nicholas's Church in the village of Vorsivka in the Zhytomyr region. On 16 January, with the involvement of radicals from C14, the Holy Ascension Church was seized in the village of Olenivka in the Chernihiv region. There is still speculation surrounding the main holy sites of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra and the Pochayiv Lavra. On the orders of the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture, they are having to undergo all manner of inventories and are threatened with the termination of their rental agreements.

We urge the OSCE to exert its influence on the Ukrainian Government and not to allow the authorities to let the situation develop to the point of religious violence and bloodshed. As we are aware, the SMM's mandate provides not only for monitoring, but also for supporting human rights and fundamental freedoms. We expect the SMM to pay close attention to the situation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

Mr. Chairperson,

It has been repeatedly recognized that the Minsk Package of Measures of 12 February 2015 endorsed by UN Security Council resolution 2202 is the one and only framework for a peaceful settlement of the crisis in Ukraine. At the same time, the current Ukrainian authorities are trying to impose on society the idea that rapid achievement of peace will mean capitulation. This is really not the case. However, reaching compromises will require the rejection of belligerent rhetoric and the intensification of meaningful, direct and honest dialogue with Donbas.

Implementation of the agreements reached by the leaders of the Normandy Quartet at the Paris (2015) and Berlin (2016) summits will help to make significant progress in the settlement process. We need to ensure that the Steinmeier formula on the procedures for the entry into force of the law on the special status of Donbas is finally set out on paper, that

forces and hardware in Stanytsia Luhanska disengage in accordance with the Framework Decision of 21 September 2016, and that the status quo is restored in the two other pilot disengagement areas in Zolote and Petrivske. Regardless of the election campaign that has started in Ukraine, we should ensure that the Ukrainian Government fulfils its commitments.

Thank you for your attention.