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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1220th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

14 March 2019

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

Mr. Chairperson,

On 7 March, at a videoconference of the relevant working group of the Minsk Trilateral Contact Group, the representatives of the Ukrainian Government and of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions recommitted themselves to the ceasefire regime. However, on this occasion too, just like when the “New Year/Christmas” truce was announced, it turned out that the Ukrainian military was unaware of the need to stop firing (at that time, the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) reported that soldiers belonging to the Ukrainian armed forces had not been given the necessary instructions). Evidently, the Ukrainian authorities had once again made no effort to inform their military personnel about the new “spring” truce, which their representative had agreed to verbally in the Trilateral Contact Group.

Unfortunately, “complete silence” has once again not actually been established in Donbas. According to the SMM, around 400 ceasefire violations were recorded during the first day of the current, 15th truce (in force since 00.01 hours on 8 March). Moreover, the movements of Ukrainian military equipment on the eve of the truce and following its announcement indicate that the Ukrainian Government did not intend to observe it in earnest. Tanks have been moved up towards the line of contact again. The SMM spotted no fewer than 24 T-64 tanks at Bakhmut railway station and the same number of T-64 tanks at Zachativka station. Heavy weapons and rocket artillery have been assembled. The SMM noted the arrival of several 220 mm Uragan multiple-launch rocket systems near Virivka in the Donetsk region, 152 mm Msta-B howitzers near Lysychansk, and 122 mm Gvozdika artillery systems near Novoaidar in the Luhansk region.

The Ukrainian armed forces continue to demonstratively disrupt the disengagement of forces and hardware in Stanytsia Luhanska, Petrivske and Zolote. In Stanytsia Luhanska these actions amount to blatant sabotage – for more than two years, the Ukrainian side has done nothing towards disengaging its forces, and this is despite the fact that the SMM has already noted on ten occasions that the necessary conditions were being observed there.

Forces were disengaged in Petrivske and Zolote, but this did not last long. Once the Ukrainian armed forces returned and occupied new positions inside these disengagement areas, skirmishes were recorded there almost daily. The SMM has spotted fortified positions belonging to the Ukrainian armed forces in Zolote on numerous occasions, most recently on 7 March.

The meeting of the Trilateral Contact Group in Minsk on 13 March did not result in a normalization of the situation either. The Ukrainian Government's representatives once again avoided reaching any agreement on additional de-escalation measures, including a ban on sabotage activities and the shelling of civilian infrastructure. There is no progress as regards the political track of the settlement either.

In a recent interview, the OSCE Secretary General Thomas Greminger once again mentioned the lack of will among the parties to implement the Minsk agreements. It seems that the Ukrainian Government really has no interest in reducing tensions in Donbas. On the contrary, it is doing everything it can to maintain tension. There is a saying in both Russian and Ukrainian that "for some people war is hell, while for others it is a dear mother" (in other words, some people suffer and some people profit). Speaking of which, against the backdrop of the military procurement corruption scandals, in which the Ukrainian President's entourage was implicated, this seems particularly telling.

The current Ukrainian authorities have little interest in the fate of the people living in Donbas. In violation of Point 8 of the Minsk Package of Measures, the trade and economic blockade of Donbas continues, and it is not some imaginary "terrorists" but real people, ordinary civilians in Donbas who suffer as a result of this. The authorities are literally pushing the region out of the common socio-economic space shared with Ukraine. Recently, the Ukrainian representative cited statistics on payments by the authorities since 2014 of some 80 billion hryvna in pensions to Donbas residents, but he failed to mention that by no means everybody can receive their pension. Nor did he say what kind of sacrifices the Ukrainian Government forces the people of Donbas to make in order to receive these payments.

In December 2018, the Pension Fund of Ukraine reported that only 562,000 people from Donbas had been able to receive their pensions. This is less than half of all the pensioners registered in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. According to a recent report by the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, over 700,000 Donbas residents lost access to their pensions "as a result of Government policy that links access to payments with registration as an internally displaced person (IDP) and the associated verification procedure". It is mentioned that the Ukrainian Government has also failed to execute the rulings of the Supreme Court of Ukraine ordering the restoration of rights to pensions and social entitlements without the need for IDP registration.

In other words, the Ukrainian Government is forcing Donbas pensioners to travel across the line of contact, where they have to queue for many hours, if they want to receive their pensions. Some people do not survive these trips. The SMM has reported more than ten deaths of elderly people at checkpoints since the start of the year. We draw attention to the need to reflect in the SMM's reports information on the negative socio-economic impact of the Ukrainian Government's blockade of everyday life in Donbas.

Generally speaking, the scale of the Ukrainian authorities' human rights violations, above all the discrimination against its citizens and inhabitants, has become threatening. Human rights organizations, in particular Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, have repeatedly drawn attention to these alarming trends. Specialist international institutions are unable to remain silent either. Just the other day, another report was issued – this time a thematic report by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on the issue of civic space and fundamental freedoms in Ukraine (covering the period from 1 January 2018 to 15 January 2019). It mentions attempts to limit them by means of shaping the regulatory framework, the inability of the State to protect groups at risk, the lack of investigation and impunity for offences, including those committed by ultra-right nationalists, the failure of the authorities to ensure security for peaceful assemblies, and the failure of the law enforcement forces to act. I might recall that, in accordance with its mandate, the SMM should not only monitor the human rights situation, but also support respect for these rights. Once again, we call on the Mission not to delay the publication of its thematic report on manifestations of aggressive nationalism and neo-Nazism in Ukraine.

The aforementioned OHCHR report also emphasizes the heavy-handed pressure by the Ukrainian authorities and intelligence services on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC). The appropriation of its places of worship and harassment of its clergy and parishioners continue. The current political environment further contributes to the exacerbation of tensions, which negatively impact the freedom of religion.

It also notes an increasing pattern of violent attacks and acts of intimidation against journalists and other media professionals, civil society and political activists, as well as defence lawyers. It mentions that these attacks have created an atmosphere of intimidation. Ukrainian, Russian and European journalists suffer in particular. There are countless examples of their harassment. Let us recall just a few.

For example, there was the arrest on trumped-up charges of the head of the RIA Novosti Ukraine news portal, Russian citizen Kirill Vyshinsky, who has been held in a pre-trial detention facility for ten months now. Or the well-known Ukrainian opposition journalist and analyst, Vladimir Skachko, who was called in for questioning last week by the Security Service of Ukraine. Incidentally, the same Ukrainian intelligence service banned the Austrian journalist Christian Wehrschütz from entering the country, expressly stating that he had become an awkward presence because he was allegedly covering the events in Ukraine in the wrong way. Here in Austria, however, the editor-in-chief of the Strana.ua news website, Igor Guzhva, was granted asylum in October of last year. I would remind you that he was forced to flee Ukraine in January 2018 because of persecution by the authorities. The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Harlem Désir, has repeatedly voiced his concern in connection with the aforementioned cases. All these acts of blatant disrespect for the journalistic profession and attempts to impose censorship and restrict freedom of speech and thought directly violate Ukraine's OSCE commitments.

The fight against dissent takes the most diverse forms. The blacklist of cultural figures that are prohibited from entering Ukraine and working in the country because of views or comments that have displeased the Ukrainian Government is constantly being updated. In addition to Russian citizens, the list currently includes the Italian actor and director Michele Placido, the Serbian film-maker Emir Kusturica, the actors Gérard Depardieu and Steven Seagal, and the lead vocalist of Limp Bizkit, American citizen Fred Durst. A week ago, the Italian singer Albano Carrisi (Al Bano), who has also become a persona non grata for

the Ukrainian intelligence services, was included in the list. A total of 147 names are on the list, which is posted on the website of the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture and regularly updated on the orders of the Security Service of Ukraine.

By introducing ever more restrictions, the Ukrainian Government continues to flagrantly violate its OSCE commitments, including the commitment to ensure the observation of the forthcoming presidential election. The fact that the Ukrainian authorities have refused to have observers from the Russian Federation participate in the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) monitoring mission is absolutely unacceptable and outrageous.

Over the past five years, the “Maidan” authorities have been engaged in a brutal assault on the Russian language and the rights of the Russian-speaking inhabitants of Ukraine. This includes the discriminatory law on education, the repeal of the law on regional languages and the introduction of language quotas for television and radio broadcasting, the ban on printed materials (including direct censorship under the guise of protecting the Ukrainian language) and restrictions on theatrical productions and concerts. And lastly, there is the imposition of the Ukrainian language and complete Ukrainization of all aspects of public life. Under the guise of battling with an imagined “aggressor”, the authorities are pursuing their own opportunistic goals at the cost of violating the fundamental rights of their own citizens.

At the same time, we see that the attempts by the “Maidan” authorities to create the image of an enemy for the Ukrainians in the form of Russia and the Russians are unsuccessful. According to a recent survey involving the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, Ukrainian public opinion is growing more positive towards Russia. Thus, 57 per cent of Ukrainians are positively disposed towards Russia as a State, and 82 per cent towards Russians in general. We are convinced that the wise Ukrainian people will still give their historical assessment of the destructive actions of those who came to power five years ago as a result of an anti-constitutional coup d'état.

Mr. Chairperson,

Instead of searching for ways to ensure national reconciliation and civil harmony, the current leadership of Ukraine is merely stepping up its bellicose rhetoric. Some of the plans announced are difficult to explain even in the run-up to the election – they contain a direct threat to pan-European stability and security. On 9 March, Petro Poroshenko announced that Ukraine “would no longer be bound by any limitations on the range of its missiles” and called for the development of long-range missiles capable of hitting targets “far behind enemy lines”. Considering the ease with which Ukraine designates its enemies, such a step will clearly not help to strengthen security on our common European continent.

Europe has repeatedly suffered as a result of the ill-considered decisions of irresponsible scheming politicians. This has often led to disasters on a national scale costing many lives. We cannot allow this to happen again. The fraternal people of Ukraine have long awaited peace and calm. Their fate should not become a bargaining chip in geopolitical games or be held hostage to anybody else’s mindless ambitions. It is necessary to stop imposing a parallel reality on the Ukrainian people, explaining all the failures and difficulties as the result of imagined “external aggression”.

There is a path to peace and national harmony in Ukraine. It lies in the implementation at the earliest opportunity of the Minsk Package of Measures of 12 February 2015, which was endorsed by the UN Security Council and is the only framework for an internal Ukrainian settlement. Pressure should be exerted on the Ukrainian Government so that it switches from politico-military “acrobatics” around this document to real action through responsible, honest and direct dialogue with Donetsk and Luhansk.

Thank you for your attention.