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AT THE 1226th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

2 May 2019

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

Mr. Chairperson,

The tragic date of 2 May also marks a shameful chapter in the history of modern-day Ukraine. Exactly five years ago, a horde of radical Maidan supporters flooded the peaceful city of Odessa. Hiding their faces with balaclavas and masks and yelling nationalistic slogans, they began imposing their rules there by force. Following clashes, dozens of citizens of Odessa – local residents who had set out for the park at Kulikovo Field for a peaceful assembly – were driven by the nationalists into the nearby Trade Union House and then burned alive. Hundreds of people were injured. Images of this tragedy then spread quickly around the globe, shocking the international community.

The Ukrainian authorities promised to investigate and punish those responsible. To this day, however, five years after the events, the international community has still not learned the truth. It would appear that there is something to hide. There has never been a proper investigation. The Head of the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, Fiona Frazer, also spoke today of the ineffectiveness of the investigation. Moreover, Ukraine ignored the findings of the Council of Europe's International Advisory Panel, which already in 2015 pointed to serious violations of investigation standards, its unjustified delay and failure to comply with the criteria of independence and effectiveness. Furthermore, the authorities tried to pass judgement not on the attackers but on those who defended themselves and their city and resisted the radicals who had descended upon them. It is strange that nobody in this room today remembered this terrible tragedy. Apparently, the death of dozens of people is just so many meaningless words for you. It is strange that the OSCE itself also remains silent.

These events only encouraged the inhabitants of other regions of Ukraine to rethink their relationship with Kyiv, where the government formed under pressure from the Maidan radicals embarked upon a course of promoting unrestrained nationalism.

The recent presidential election in Ukraine showed what people thought of the actions of the "Maidan" authorities and the policy pursued personally by Petro Poroshenko. For all the shortcomings and violations permitted during the electoral process, one thing is clear: the Ukrainians overwhelmingly rejected the destructive policy based on lies, rabid Russophobia, the incitement of radical nationalism, the glorification of the Nazis and their followers, and disrespect for the rights and needs of the people living in

Ukraine and Ukraine's obligations under international law. People are obliged to live in constant fear. Clearly, it was a protest vote in the hope of change.

The past five years were years of missed opportunities for open and honest discussion between the Ukrainian authorities and the inhabitants of many regions of Ukraine, including Donbas. The Ukrainian Government has systematically increased the pressure on certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, effectively driving them out of the socio-economic space shared with Ukraine. The Ukrainian authorities called the inhabitants of Donbas terrorists and separatists for disagreeing with the outcome of the coup d'état in 2014, used the army and intelligence services against the civilian population and began to deprive them of their fundamental rights, including the right to life. Pandering to the radical nationalists, the Ukrainian authorities imposed a trade, economic, transport and social blockade on the region. The demarcation line established there changed people's fate and divided families. It has become a formidable obstacle for many who are forced to cross this line. According to the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), 19 people have died while queuing at the checkpoints since the beginning of 2019 alone. We share the concern about the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Donbas as a result of the Ukrainian Government's policy of ratcheting up tensions, including military tensions.

The Ukrainian leadership is refusing to implement the Minsk agreements, which are meant to promote a settlement of the internal Ukrainian conflict. The Ukrainian Government distorts the true causes of the conflict and accuses Russia of all its misfortunes, while continuing to stubbornly avoid the most important thing – dialogue with Donbas. There is not even a hint of desire on the part of the Ukrainian authorities to listen to the region's people and build a joint future with them. Let me quote from the statement made a few days ago by the current Minister for Social Policy of Ukraine, Andriy Reva: "Everyone who was pro-Ukrainian has left Donbas. And those who want to receive two pensions – both there and here – let them be patient. I have absolutely no sympathy for anyone to be honest. I am sorry only for the soldiers and officers who have died because of these scum, and their families." So, for the Ukrainian authorities the people left in Donbas are just "scum". The absence of a response to such statements by the current President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko, Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman and other government officials and the silence on this matter by the representative of Ukraine in this room can be taken to mean that they support this aggressive rhetoric and this attitude towards the people of Donbas. We also note the representatives of many Western countries shamefacedly averting their eyes when they hear such statements, but they do not condemn them. It is clear that political expediency trumps concern for people. The same logic was evident in the attitude towards the 17 miners who perished on 25 April in Yurivka near Luhansk. The Ukrainian authorities did not even offer technical assistance to the Luhansk rescue team. In that situation, Russia simply could not remain indifferent to the misfortune that had befallen these people.

The outgoing Ukrainian authorities are trying to surreptitiously push through the most controversial initiatives, "tightening the screws" further. Mr. Poroshenko insisted on rushing through consideration by the Verkhovna Rada of the blatantly discriminatory law on ensuring the functioning of Ukrainian as the State language. It affects the rights not only of Russian-speaking Ukrainians but also of many national minorities. Last week the Ukrainian Parliament adopted it at its final reading. As usual, no one was interested in the opinion of the inhabitants of Donbas. This legislative act, which is in fact aimed at total Ukrainization, not only contravenes Point 11 of the Minsk Package of Measures providing for the right to linguistic self-determination, but is also at odds with international law and Ukraine's human rights commitments, including those undertaken within the OSCE.

Forcible seizures of parishes of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) continue, and pressure is being exerted on its clergy and parishioners. Four churches were seized in the Rivne region on 12, 13, 14 and 17 April, one church in the Vinnytsia region on 16 April, and an arson attack was carried out on a UOC church in the Kharkiv region on 14 April.

We regretfully observe how the Ukrainian Government has deprived the people of Donbas of virtually all their legal rights because of their dissent and excluded them from the political and socio-economic processes in Ukraine. Through their actions, the Ukrainian authorities have unilaterally severed ties with the population of certain areas of Donbas, making its inhabitants *de facto* disenfranchised persons in the country of their birth. Under these conditions, the Russian Federation, guided exclusively by humanitarian considerations, decided to provide the inhabitants of certain areas of Donbas with an opportunity to acquire Russian citizenship in a simplified manner – on the territory of the Russian Federation and without having to relinquish their existing citizenship. There is no question of the compulsory universal issue of passports, as has been suggested by some representatives, who failed to understand what is essentially at stake.

Mr. Chairperson,

The situation in Donbas remains tense. The current ceasefire agreements are not being respected. At the meeting of the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) on 24 April, as during the videoconference of the Working Group on Security Issues a week earlier, the parties failed to reach an agreement on strengthening the ceasefire regime in the light of the Easter holidays. The Ukrainian negotiators once again avoided a meaningful discussion on all the aspects of a settlement. The tactics chosen by the Ukrainian side border on a complete inability to negotiate. Ukraine's intentions are most graphically reflected in today's public comments on Facebook by the commander of the "combined forces operation" General Serhiy Nayev. He reported that over the past year the Ukrainian armed forces have gained control of more than 24 square kilometres of territory near the line of contact, including three villages – Svobodny, Yuzhne and Shumy. In other words, the Ukrainian Government is geared up for an exclusively military solution to the conflict. And every new day continues to be accompanied by shelling and destruction.

Against this backdrop, the Ukrainian armed forces continue the redeployment of heavy weaponry to Donbas. They shell civilian facilities with different kinds of weapons. According to the SMM reports, over the past two weeks residential buildings were damaged in the Kyivskiy and Petrovskiy districts of Donetsk, Dokuchaievsk and Trokhizbenka. In Zolote-5/Mykhailivka, in addition to houses a functioning school was once again shelled, and an 11-year-old girl was injured in the courtyard of her own home.

Two years ago, SMM paramedic Joseph Stone was killed by an exploding mine in the Luhansk region. Such is the price being paid for the absence of dialogue in the TCG between the Ukrainian Government and the authorities in Luhansk and Donetsk on demining and additional de-escalation measures. Unfortunately, there has still been no progress in this regard.

The Ukrainian Government has obstructed the disengagement of forces and hardware in Stanytsia Luhanska, Petrivske and Zolote. There is a need for new momentum or rather political will on the part of the Ukrainian Government that would not only enable this process to be carried out in the aforementioned three areas, but also make it possible to begin agreeing on new ones. As can be seen from the SMM reports, most of the trouble takes place inside the Zolote disengagement area, where skirmishes occur almost daily. Armoured vehicles belonging to the Ukrainian armed forces have been spotted there twice in the past two weeks.

Mr. Chairperson,

Amidst the bellicose rhetoric by the outgoing Poroshenko, the new Ukrainian leadership has a chance to overcome the impasse in the entire settlement process. We trust that it will heed the message from society regarding the need for change and will take advantage of this window of opportunity. Relations with

Donbas can be normalized through the full implementation of the Minsk Package of Measures on the basis of direct, honest and responsible dialogue with its representatives. Among the priority steps, implementation of the agreements reached by the “Normandy Quartet” leaders at the summits in Paris (2015) and Berlin (2016) needs to be ensured. I am referring to the completion of the disengagement of forces and hardware by the parties in Stanytsia Luhanska, Petrivske and Zolote, and the formalization in writing of the “Steinmeier formula” on the procedure for the entry into force of the law on the special status of Donbas. We hope that the other “Normandy Quartet” capitals also fully appreciate the need for the Ukrainian Government to honour the existing agreements.

We take the position that the Minsk Package of Measures of 12 February 2015, which is endorsed by United Nations Security Council resolution 2202, remains the only internationally recognized framework for a settlement of the internal Ukrainian conflict.

Thank you for your attention.