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PC.DEL/601/19

30 May 2019

ENGLISH

Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1230th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

30 May 2019

In response to the report by the Head of the OSCE Mission to Moldova

Mr. Chairperson,

We are grateful to the Head of the OSCE Mission to Moldova, Mr. Claus Neukirch, for his detailed analysis of the situation in the host country and the Transdniestrian settlement.

It is difficult not to agree with the statement in the report that the peace process is losing its dynamism. Unfortunately, the intensity of the negotiations is decreasing. The last meeting of the Permanent Conference on Political Issues in the Framework of the Negotiation Process for the Transdniestrian Settlement in the “5+2” format took place in Rome exactly a year ago. There have been no talks between political representatives of the authorities in Chişinău and Tiraspol in the “1+1” format since October 2018. This is obviously not the best way for the parties to implement the practical agreements already concluded in 2016 on socio-humanitarian issues, which are of vital importance to the population on both banks of the Dniester River. The report by the Head of the OSCE Mission confirms that most of the measures contained in the “Berlin Plus” package have only been partially implemented.

References to the difficult internal political processes in Moldova cannot serve as a convincing excuse for the current situation. It is well known that the government continues to function in the country, and the implementation of the agreed measures does not require additional decisions by parliament. In general, we believe that attempts to tailor the Transdniestrian settlement to the timetable of internal political events in Moldova and Transdniestria are likely to cause the negotiation process to freeze. Suffice to say that the presidential election in Moldova and the election of a new Supreme Council in Transdniestria are scheduled for next year.

The successful visit to the region on 10 and 11 May by the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Franco Frattini, demonstrated that the parties are receptive to input from international participants in the negotiation process. More active use needs to be made of this tool where the political weight of the OSCE Mission is insufficient. We trust that the planned visit to the region by a delegation of mediators and observers will enable us to make up for lost time.

Intensification of the negotiation process at all levels, first and foremost in the “5+2” format, will help to improve the situation. Recently, however, we have frequently heard incorrect interpretations of the

Hamburg, Vienna and Milan Ministerial Statements on this subject and there have been attempts to link the organization of “5+2” meetings with certain preliminary practical arrangements by the parties. No such linkage is formalized in the agreed documents, nor could it be. This runs counter to the sense of international mediation in crisis settlement. On the contrary, in the Protocol of the Berlin “5+2” meeting, the participants confirmed their commitment to the 2012 document on the principles and procedures for the conduct of negotiations within the framework of the Permanent Conference, which envisages the holding of such meetings at least six times a year. We recall that in the written explanations to the OSCE participating States of 20 November 2018 ahead of the approval of the OSCE budget, the head of the field presence agreed to organize three to four meetings in the “5+2” format in 2019. We trust that the Mission will adhere to this plan.

Our shared task is to help the authorities in Chişinău and Tiraspol to achieve full implementation of the agreements already concluded. It is important to encourage them to find solutions to other long-standing differences in line with the proven practice of “small steps”. We firmly believe that this will help to further strengthen the atmosphere of trust between Moldova and Transdniestria and, as a result, establish a basis for progress in solving the Transdniestrian problem.

We are surprised at the latest mention in the report by the Head of the OSCE Mission of the issue of ammunition depots in Cobasna (Kolbasna) and the activities of the Operational Group of Russian Forces. We already explained this on the occasion of the last Mission report in November 2018. We repeat: Russia is committed to withdrawing its munitions when the appropriate conditions for this are in place. This was the case in 2001–2002, until the failure to sign the Kozak Memorandum. In the statement by the Ministerial Council in Porto in 2002, the withdrawal of the Operational Group of Russian Forces was clearly linked with the arrival at a political settlement of the Transdniestrian crisis. It is quite obvious that the current negative dynamic makes this less likely to happen.

I should like to express the hope that the activities of the OSCE Mission will be in line with the overall task of harmonizing the efforts of all parties involved in the negotiation process. It is important to avoid bringing any artificial irritants into this process. This applies, for example, to inappropriate public warnings by the Head of the OSCE Mission about the inauguration in Moscow of the “Transdniestria” Foundation for the Development of Social and Cultural Relations. The direct participants in the negotiations should be well aware that according to the Protocol of Agreed Issues of 11 March 1996, Transdniestria has “the right to independently establish and maintain international contacts in economic, scientific, technical and cultural spheres”. The document was signed by the Prime Minister of Moldova and the Head of the OSCE Mission.

Close attention really needs to be paid to the cases of harassment of Russian journalists in Moldova. We have repeatedly raised this issue in the OSCE, notably with the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media.

In conclusion, we should like once again to confirm our unchanged approach as a mediator and guarantor State in the settlement of the Transdniestrian problem. We firmly believe that responsibility for achieving mutually acceptable agreements lies first and foremost with Moldova and Transdniestria. We shall assist in the search for compromises in close co-ordination with the Chairmanship and other participants in the “5+2” process with a view to furthering negotiations to find a sustainable, just and comprehensive settlement on the banks of the Dniester River.

Thank you for your attention.