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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
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AT THE 1233rd MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

20 June 2019

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

Mr. Chairperson,

The situation in Ukraine remains discouraging. The Ukrainian authorities are still not taking practical steps to establish peace in the east of the country. In Donbas the shooting continues. The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) has reported further casualties and destruction of civilian infrastructure. The level of tension remains unchanged and there has been an increase in the use of weapons prohibited by the Minsk agreements. An analysis of SMM data in those cases when the Mission was able to identify which side was responsible for the shooting shows that since 10 June the number of violations of the ceasefire regime by the Ukrainian armed forces has been many times higher than the corresponding figure for the militia.

The Ukrainian security forces continue their tactic of a “creeping offensive” in what is known as the “grey zone”, provoking military tension. For example, on 12 June Nazar Ilnitsky, press officer of the 24th Mechanized Brigade of the Ukrainian armed forces, announced that soldiers from the brigade had entrenched themselves in new positions in Marinka. He reported that the Ukrainian armed forces had moved very close to the Petrovskiyi district of Donetsk (at a distance of almost 200 metres). It is hardly surprising that such actions have led to more frequent shelling by the Ukrainian armed forces, resulting in civilians being injured in the courtyard of their own home in Marinka on 15 June.

The Ukrainian armed forces continue to shell residential districts in Donbas. On 8 June, an elderly woman was injured in the shoulder while in her own home in Zaitseve. On 10 June, the Mission established, albeit with some delay, that a seven-year-old girl had been injured in the village of Vesele. Fresh damage to residential buildings and public facilities was spotted. The school in Zolote-5/Mykhailivka was shelled again on 13 and 17 June. It has been targeted by the Ukrainian armed forces at least ten times since the start of the year. According to media reports, on the eve of the meeting of the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG), in the early hours of 19 June the Ukrainian armed forces subjected the Petrovskiyi district of Donetsk to intense shelling using large-calibre weapons. In addition to residential buildings, Donetsk Children’s Municipal Clinical Hospital No. 4 and its expensive equipment were damaged. These are the results of the actions of the Ukrainian security forces and of the accommodating silence observed by a number of OSCE participating States.

In violation of the TCG Decision on Mine Action of 3 March 2016, the Ukrainian armed forces are busy laying mines in Donbas, creating a direct threat to civilians. Recently, in the vicinity of Krasnohorivka alone the SMM discovered some 1,700 mines near the Ukrainian armed forces' positions. Earlier, in May, the Mission detected more than 3,000 mines near Pyshevyk. Civilians are often the victims of these deadly traps, which the Ukrainian armed forces are laying on a massive scale. For example, on 7 June two farmers on a tractor hit a mine while working in their field near Ukrainian armed forces-controlled Popasna (report dated 13 June). It was a miracle that they both survived.

The Ukrainian security forces continue to use unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) for reconnaissance purposes and adjusting the line of fire. On 12 June, the SMM reported the launch of a UAV by Ukrainian soldiers near Trokhizbenka (report dated 13 June). Such actions are in direct violation of the Minsk agreements and jeopardize the SMM's UAVs, which may be mistaken for combat targets.

The Ukrainian side has failed to begin the disengagement of forces and hardware in Stanytsia Luhanska, on which an agreement had been reached at the TCG meeting in Minsk on 5 June. The fundamental agreement was to disengage regardless of any possible provocations inside the disengagement area. This process did not begin on 10 or 16 June. As an excuse for their failure to fulfil their commitments, the Ukrainian authorities are citing the ceasefire violations reported by the SMM in the run-up to the dates agreed for the start of disengagement. However, these violations are just isolated cases of weapons being used. It is obvious that they were in fact intended solely for the purpose of the SMM being able to report the use of weapons. All this was done exclusively with the aim of disrupting the disengagement.

Mr. Chairperson,

As is well known, the change of leadership in Ukraine following the presidential election has given many people grounds for cautious optimism. This change of power came about because of Ukrainian society's yearning for change, including the resumption of inclusive nationwide dialogue, in which people with a different point of view can feel they are listened to rather than marginalized by means of artillery shelling or blockades at every opportunity. The new Ukrainian leadership has inherited a large number of highly controversial legislative innovations that have only served to divide the country's inhabitants even further. The previous authorities openly played on tensions and did not seek to create a truly unifying agenda. Attempts were made to redefine the identity of the Ukrainian people by revising their educational, linguistic and religious rights to please a nationalistic minority. All this only pushed Donbas further away and made the prospect of a settlement of the internal Ukrainian crisis less likely.

Recently, the TCG resumed its work in Minsk after a hiatus of more than a month and a half owing to the electoral processes in Ukraine. At the same time, we are currently observing attempts by the "war party", which has lost its paramount position in Ukrainian politics, to inculcate in the country's new leadership the notion that the Minsk agreements are fundamentally pernicious, flawed and even anti-Ukrainian. The prospect of their implementation at all is presented pretty much as "capitulation on the part of the Ukrainian Government". The new authorities are encouraged to continue sabotaging the fulfilment of their existing commitments. Consequently, very conflicting signals are coming from the Ukrainian leadership today. While declaring their commitment to the Minsk agreements, the Ukrainian authorities are at the same time making it known that they are not ready for direct dialogue with those in Donetsk and Luhansk whom they continue to call "separatists". We see how pressure of different kinds is being exerted on the Ukrainian negotiators, including the opening of criminal proceedings for the mere fact of discussing the conditions for the implementation of the Minsk Package of Measures.

Unfortunately, yesterday's TCG meeting in Minsk did not lead to any noticeable progress. The process risks never gaining momentum as a result of the Ukrainian Government's attempts to call its

representatives to order and not allow them to arrive at substantive solutions. In these circumstances, it is important that the current Ukrainian negotiators – both new ones and well-known persons in the Minsk process – have the necessary authority and instructions to reach compromises.

To our great regret, the conflict in Donbas remains a “festering sore” on the body of Ukraine. Its unresolved nature exacerbates the situation not only in the region but also far beyond its borders. For example, Ukrainian law enforcement officials are unable to control the flow of weapons in the country. According to data from the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine alone, up to 5 million weapons, including illegal ones, are in the hands of the population. Sometimes this situation backfires on those who have done everything to promote the military operation in Donbas. For example, on 19 June, Dmytro Tymchuk, a member of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, was killed in his apartment in Kyiv under mysterious circumstances by a shot to the head from the pistol that had been awarded to him by the State.

Mr. Chairperson,

This week marks the fifth anniversary of the murder of the Russian journalists Igor Kornelyuk and Anton Voloshin in Donbas. They came under targeted mortar fire from Ukrainian positions while they were filming events near the Luhansk village of Metalist on 17 June 2014. Both died that day. To date, the Ukrainian Government has failed to carry out a proper investigation into this crime, just as with the deaths of Anatoly Klyan, Andrea Rocchelli and Pavel Sheremet and with other high-profile murders of journalists. Instead, it is stepping up the “witch-hunt” in Ukraine – journalists are persecuted and land in prison because of their views and professional activities, and are included in various blacklists. We urge the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media to keep a close and constant eye on the issue of the persecution of journalists and investigations of crimes committed against them.

Mr. Chairperson,

Despite the ambitious claims by the new President of Ukraine regarding his desire to end the conflict in Donbas as soon as possible, there is still no clear programme of action by the Ukrainian Government to implement the Minsk agreements. Moreover, there have been sceptical remarks on the key negotiation formats and the settlement mechanisms already in place, which, it must be acknowledged, have never been used to their full potential so far.

Meanwhile, all the tools necessary to solve these problems are well established. The principal tool is the unique negotiation mechanism of the Trilateral Contact Group in Minsk, which was endorsed by the United Nations Security Council in resolution 2202 of 17 February 2015, and which constitutes the only platform where the Ukrainian Government and the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk have the opportunity to engage in direct dialogue within the working groups established on a wide range of issues. The Ukrainian Government should be encouraged to implement the Minsk Package of Measures of 12 February 2015 on the basis of such dialogue.

Thank you for your attention.