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PC.DEL/1251/19  
8 November 2019

ENGLISH  
Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,  
AT THE 1246th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

7 November 2019

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

Mr. Chairperson,

The situation both in Donbas and in Ukraine as a whole is evolving in different directions. Unfortunately, the alarming trends far outnumber the few positive signals being received.

On 1 November, the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) reported having received notification from the militia, and a day later from the Ukrainian side, regarding the completion of the withdrawal of forces and hardware from the disengagement area in Zolote. This is a positive signal, which should be followed by the dismantling of fortifications and the demining of territory inside the disengagement area. We urge the SMM not to reduce the intensity of its monitoring of these processes. Demilitarization of the area, if successfully completed, will help to reduce tensions.

At the same time, against the backdrop of the reports from Zolote, the Ukrainian armed forces once again demonstratively disrupted disengagement in Petrivske. The date for the start of this process – 4 November – was agreed upon at a meeting of the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) in Minsk and publicly announced by President Volodymyr Zelenskyi. However, shortly before the planned disengagement, the Joint Forces Operation (JFO) headquarters officially stated that the Ukrainian side did not intend to begin disengaging and suggested a different day. They made reference to a violation of the “silence regime” inside the disengagement area recorded by the SMM on 30 October, which the Ukrainian side immediately attributed to the militia. In that connection, as the Mission report indicates, the monitors in Petrivske heard two shots 1 to 2 km to the south-west of that settlement, in other words, close to entrenchments belonging to the Ukrainian military. It is significant that for a long time the Ukrainian Government has been avoiding taking additional steps to monitor and strengthen the ceasefire regime, including disciplinary measures to punish those who violate it. In the end, the JFO headquarters called the statement by representatives of the militia regarding their readiness to begin disengagement on 4 November “another act of provocation”. In other words, they perceive the intention to carry out practical measures to reduce tension as a “provocation”. The SMM once again observed the launch of signal flares by the militia and noted the absence of any reciprocal action from the Ukrainian side, as a result of which the disengagement has not resumed. We hope that it will take place at the earliest opportunity with the agreement of the Ukrainian Government and the representatives of Donetsk.

We urge the Ukrainian Government to take a responsible approach to the agreements it has reached in the TCG with the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk. By putting forward unilateral demands that are not foreseen by these agreements, it indicates a desire to give a political slant to the disengagement situation, instead of a commitment to real de-escalation as soon as possible. I recall that in the case of Petrivske, just as in Zolote, we are talking not about launching an initial process, but about addressing violations committed following the disengagement that occurred there in 2016. We note the need to adhere to the procedures set out in the schedule agreed upon in the TCG. These agreements, incidentally, do not contain any requirement for a seven-day “silence regime”.

Armed confrontation in Donbas continues to cut lives short and destroy people’s futures. A couple died as a result of a grenade explosion in Kurakhove. The SMM visited a 16-year-old boy in hospital in Pervomaisk, who had been injured a few weeks earlier at a village celebration in Zolote-5/Mykhailivka. This is the same settlement where children and teenagers are frequently the target of shelling from Ukrainian positions. According to SMM reports, on 23 October a functioning school there was shelled for the 15th time. By sheer luck, none of the schoolchildren were injured on that occasion.

The Mission has reported damage to houses in Yasynuvata and the settlements of Oleksandrivka and Holmivskyi located in certain areas of the Donetsk region. We may note that a five-storey residential building in Yasynuvata was shelled from a west-north-westerly direction by a BMP-2 armoured infantry fighting vehicle and an apartment was damaged. It is perfectly clear that this act of intimidation of civilians has nothing to do with firing at military targets.

The number of casualties not related to landmines continues to grow. According to the SMM, at least 16 people have been injured as a result of the shelling of territories in certain areas of Donbas since the “bread truce” was declared. During the same period, three people have been injured on the other side of the line of contact. The more than fivefold difference makes it clear that civilians continue to be one of the targets of the Ukrainian security forces. We insist on the need for the prompt publication of summarized data by the SMM on casualties and the destruction of civilian infrastructure. A thematic report by the Mission on this topic is long overdue.

Continued shelling near critical facilities is leading to a further deterioration in the situation of the population. We appreciate the efforts of the SMM, which during the period from autumn 2018 until this summer alone has facilitated some 1,300 “windows of silence” necessary to conduct repairs and ensure the normal operation of more than a hundred such facilities and utilities infrastructure. We note the recent thematic report by the Mission on facilitation and monitoring of civilian infrastructure repair in Donbas.

At the same time, we regret that, despite the efforts being made, armed provocations with fresh casualties continue to occur. A recent example was the injury on 24 October of two men carrying out repairs near the Kondrashivka pumping station. The situation around the Donetsk filtration station also remains worrying. In August, the SMM reported that the Ukrainian armed forces had set up a combat position in the “grey zone” 200 metres to the west of the filtration station. People working at the filtration station and the SMM monitors escorting them are forced to go past this position on their way to work, risking their lives each time.

We urge the Ukrainian authorities and their mentors in Washington and Brussels to fully recognize the negative consequences for the civilian population resulting from the indulgence of the belligerent aspirations of the Ukrainian security forces and armed nationalists. They are stubbornly trying to distract Ukrainian society’s attention from the need to find ways to solve the real root causes of the extremely serious socio-political crisis that led to internal armed conflict. Instead of this, we see persistent attempts to mislead the Ukrainians into searching for “enemies” among neighbouring States and peoples with which they share ties. All this merely intensifies the contradictions within Ukraine itself.

Mr. Chairperson,

The Ukrainian representative has spoken a great deal about the difficult situation of the people of Donbas. However, if the Ukrainian Government is really concerned about the humanitarian situation in the region and the fate of its people, it should cease fire immediately, put a stop to the destructive influence on the security situation of radical nationalists and step up the Minsk negotiation process with Donetsk and Luhansk on all aspects of a settlement. We urge the leadership of Ukraine to lift the inhumane socio-economic and transport blockade of Donbas and recognize its responsibility for resolving the conflict there. The key to this is direct dialogue between the Ukrainian Government and the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk in the TCG, the swift implementation of the Package of Measures of 12 February 2015, endorsed by the United Nations Security Council, and the achievement of a lasting and viable settlement. The region is tired of war. The people need peace.

Mr. Chairperson,

The activities of radical Ukrainian nationalists continue to make the resolution of differences not only in Donbas but also in the rest of Ukraine a more distant prospect. Appalling acts of vandalism were committed in Odessa this weekend with the tacit acquiescence of the authorities. On 2 November, radicals removed from the building of the Primorskyi district military enlistment office the bas-relief of Georgy Zhukov, the eminent Soviet military leader who participated in the liberation of Ukraine from Nazi occupation. On the same day, numerous groups of concerned citizens of Odessa organized an improvised memorial at the demolition site and brought flowers and candles. However, the radicals destroyed this memorial too, smashing the lamps and candles and burning the flowers. Many media outlets showed video footage of the incident. The Ukrainian “dialogue police”, who were present when the flowers were burned, not only failed to take any steps to detain those involved in these nationalist excesses, but also did not try to stop them.

The aim of the radicals is clear, namely to impose their twisted values on people across Ukraine. The people of Odessa have had their share of extremely difficult trials. One need only recall how supporters of nationalistic ideology did not simply intimidate people but cold-bloodedly burned them alive in Odessa’s Trade Union House on 2 May 2014. More than five and a half years later, the crime has still not been solved. The law enforcement agencies of Ukraine, already under the new leadership, are not conducting effective investigations to identify the perpetrators and real causes of what happened. An initiative for parliamentary assistance in the investigation into the tragedy proposed by a people’s deputy representing Odessa in the Verkhovna Rada has also been blocked. It seems that the authorities are continuing the policy of hushing up excesses and whitewashing neo-Nazis in Ukraine and are trying to hammer it home to the Ukrainian and international public that “there are no neo-Nazis in Ukraine”.

Meanwhile, on 1 November in the city of Kalush in the Ivano-Frankivsk region, with the permission of the local authorities, members of the Ukrainian Nationalist Movement unveiled a bas-relief to Dmytro Paliev, Hauptsturmführer of the SS Galicia Division, on the facade of the district House of Culture.

We recall that the cultivation of aggressive nationalism can have a most negative impact on pan-European security as a whole. We urge the relevant OSCE institutions, including the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, to keep a close eye on this topic. We expect the SMM to publish a thematic report on the manifestations of aggressive nationalism, neo-Nazism and xenophobia in Ukraine.

Thank you for your attention.