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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
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AT THE 1124th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

15 December 2016

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

Mr. Chairperson,
Colleagues,

The year 2016 is drawing to a close. However, we can hardly be said to have drawn any closer to our goal of a settlement of the crisis in Ukraine through the implementation of the Minsk Package of Measures. It has proved possible to avert large-scale military activities, but the punitive operation itself against the people of Donbas has yet to end. The shelling of towns continues, civilians are killed, and houses and infrastructure destroyed. It is clear that, unlike the overwhelming majority of the Ukrainian population, certain representatives of the Kyiv regime are not interested in the establishment of a durable truce and the verifiable withdrawal of forces and hardware from the line of contact.

The two “back-to-school truces” in 2015 and 2016 clearly demonstrated this. The Ukrainian Government is able to keep its security forces in check when it wants to. However, as soon as the domestic political situation in Ukraine heats up, the “war factor”, the non-existent “hybrid threat” and other verbal gymnastics are once again in demand in Kyiv in order to force the Ukrainian people to tolerate even more and to ask the Western partners for money.

If it were not for the so-called “Russian threat”, how could the outcome of the activities of the current regime in Kyiv be justified? What was the point of gathering on the Maidan and feeding people with American cookies and empty promises? The fact is that, despite the propaganda, people are gradually beginning to see clearly. The results of Western countries’ interference in Ukrainian affairs are increasingly apparent – chaos, devastation, mayhem, corruption, the use of the army and gangs of nationalists against the civilian population, and the severing of long-standing ties with fraternal nations. It has provoked one of the greatest crises in Europe (after NATO’s aggression against the former Yugoslavia) and caused considerable damage to all of Ukraine’s neighbours – to the west and east, to the north and south of its borders, but primarily to Ukraine itself. Attempts to blame all the current misfortunes on Russia, regardless of the circumstances, are a symptom of the dangerous

mental disorder called Russophobia. It clouds the mind and makes people take the wrong decisions, which are costly to everyone. A sober view of the situation can help recovery from this ailment, if it is not too late, of course.

Everyone agrees that the Minsk agreements provide the basis for a political settlement of the crisis in Ukraine. Safeguarding the legal and material guarantees for the inhabitants of Donbas through the enactment of a law on special status and its consolidation in the Constitution is a chance to preserve the territorial integrity of the country. However, we are hearing strange interpretations from the representatives of Kyiv, at the Ministerial Council meeting in Hamburg and elsewhere. The preservation of Donbas as part of Ukraine is for some reason regarded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine as an attempt to destroy Ukrainian statehood. First of all, they say it is necessary to cleanse Donbas of “anti-Ukrainian” elements. They propose sending in some kind of international presence to do the “mopping-up work” and only then to hold elections, which the Kyiv authorities will be able to arrange. It is not clear who they want to deceive in this way.

Ukrainian statehood will be unlikely to suffer as a result of the reintegration of one of the leading regions of the country. Whether the current authorities will suffer as a result of this is a different story.

Meanwhile, however, we are seeing a systematic policy by the Ukrainian Government to “separate” Donbas from the rest of Ukraine. This implies not only the severing of humanitarian, economic and financial ties, but also an ideological rejection. Attacks on the Russian language and culture, the epic “decommunization” in the worst traditions of the Soviet era, and the glorification of Nazi collaborators are plain to see. All of this merely divides the inhabitants of Ukraine. The sooner this stops, the easier it will be to normalize the situation.

For now, the Ukrainian Government is only making demands but doing nothing. The border question can be resolved only in the order established in the Package of Measures. Attempts to make this topic a priority to the detriment of solving the political elements of a settlement are counter-productive.

In the meantime, the security zone is being pumped full of weapons and equipment. Now the Ukrainian security forces are at times placing more obstacles in the way of patrols by the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) there than the militia. The Ukrainian Government continues to disrupt the disengagement of forces in Stanysia Luhanska. In the early hours of 1 December, the Mission’s camera recorded an exchange of fire within the disengagement area. The chronology provided by the SMM clearly indicates that to begin with three strikes were fired at positions of the Luhansk People’s Republic. Over the past two weeks, towns and villages controlled by the militia have been subjected to shelling on 13 occasions from directions where troops belonging to the Ukrainian armed forces are stationed. In violation of the Package of Measures and its Addendum, 22 pieces of military equipment belonging to the Ukrainian armed forces were recorded in the security zone between 1 and 12 December.

A further example is the Ukrainian Government’s persistent sabotage of the work in Minsk of the working group on economic issues, which makes it considerably more difficult to resolve the issues of water and electricity supply. We also note the selective approach to the alleviation of the humanitarian situation along the line of contact. We fail to understand

Ukraine's insistence on wanting to open a checkpoint at Zolote, where mines still pose a danger. The Ukrainian Government is not even considering the possibility of opening up access through the town of Shchastia and has itself closed the checkpoint in Zaitseve, transferring it instead to Maiorsk, where the risk to the safety of civilians is growing. On 14 December, Ukrainian border guards fired at people at the Maiorsk checkpoint, and there were casualties.

Since reference has already been made to the latest report by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on the human rights situation in Ukraine, I should like to comment on some of the points made in what is on the whole a one-sided document. The restrictions on the right to freedom of movement continue to cause disproportionate suffering among the civilian population living in the areas affected by the conflict. The OHCHR has documented cases of sexual violence and harassment of young women at government-controlled entry and exit checkpoints along the line of contact. We have been talking about this for a long time: the blockade of the region needs to be lifted, and the discrimination against the residents of Donbas has to stop.

The longer the Ukrainian Government pursues its policy of apartheid in Donbas, the more crimes of this kind there will be.

Esteemed colleagues,

We are observing alarming signs of the exacerbation of the internal political conflict in Ukraine. The size and number of protest demonstrations are growing, and crime is rampant. Revelations about corruption are multiplying. The spy mania is escalating. Nadiya Savchenko, about whose fate some of our colleagues were so concerned, has been excluded from the party whose list she headed and portrayed as an "enemy of the people".

This runs the risk of exacerbating the situation in the conflict zone, which could result in fresh shelling, destruction and victims among the civilian population. We call on all those who have an interest in stabilizing the situation in Ukraine to use their influence to prevent another escalation.

However the situation progresses in the corridors of Ukrainian power, we take the position that there is no sensible alternative to the full and systematic implementation of the Minsk agreements. Sooner or later, the Ukrainian Government will have to implement them. The sooner this happens, the easier it will be for Ukrainian society to return to the path towards normalization.

In conclusion, we should like to emphasize that since 21 March 2014 a new political and legal situation has taken shape in the region. The Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol became an integral part of the Russian Federation. Anyone interested in constructive dialogue rather than fruitless altercations should also respect this.

Thank you for your attention.