

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY
MR. ANDREY KELIN, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1061st MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

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

Mr. Chairperson,

The situation in Ukraine has been discussed in detail recently in the widest range of formats – during telephone conversations between State leaders, at the Paris meeting of the Normandy format foreign ministers, at meetings of the Contact Group and working subgroups in Minsk and, lastly, at the Annual Security Review Conference.

The main outcome of the Paris meeting was the confirmation that there is no alternative to the Minsk agreements. This is undoubtedly important, especially in the light of the statements made by various hawks, such as United States Senator John McCain who has said that: “It is time that the United States and our European allies recognize the failure of the Minsk agreements”. Of course, it is far easier to do this than to work in earnest on their implementation. Nevertheless, just six months remain for the implementation of the Minsk Package of Measures, and there are many obstacles to be overcome.

It is requiring great effort on our part to continue trying to persuade Luhansk and Donetsk that it is worth remaining part of Ukraine. Our main argument is that if the Minsk agreements are implemented in good faith the population of these regions will receive constitutional and material guarantees of the observance of their rights. This should involve socio-economic, cultural and linguistic spheres as well as security, including protection against the nationalistic groups that are still armed and out of control.

Unfortunately, Kyiv’s unilateral actions – its attempt to carry out constitutional reform without consulting Donetsk and Luhansk, its refusal to enact the law on special status and the amnesty law, the continuing so-called alarming shelling of residential areas and specifically the complete blockade – undermine the credibility of that argument. In this way, Ukraine is through its own efforts alienating its own region and its citizens.

Today’s priority is to ensure a complete ceasefire and the withdrawal of heavy weapons from the line of contact. Then there would be no attacks on houses, kindergartens,

hospitals and markets, there would be no shelling of the firing positions of the Ukrainian armed forces. Further destruction and fresh victims only antagonize matters. The Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) rightly reports an increasingly pessimistic mood in the region and a military escalation is expected. The Ukrainian military has introduced the practice of paying extra to those who participate directly in military operations. The empty cartridges are presented as confirmation of this. It is clear where the shells and bullets are flying.

The statements by the Chief of the Ukrainian General Staff, Viktor Muzhenko, about the supposed impending offensive by the insurgents send another alarming signal. Armed provocations from the Ukrainian side usually follow such claims. We urge the parties to refrain from ill-considered action.

The situation is complicated by the activities of the so-called volunteer battalions, which are not subordinate to the central authorities and choose themselves which orders to obey and which not. Even those who previously remained sheepishly silent, trying to preserve the purity of Kyiv's image, are forced to speak about these battalions' crimes – murders, kidnapping, torture and inhuman treatment. The Right Sector, Azov, Tornado, Kyivska Rus and other battalions are not only engaging in looting and abductions (30 people were kidnapped in the Donetsk region in the space of a week), they are directly involved in the shelling of towns. These groups are the most odious destabilizing element of the situation in Donbas and in Ukraine as a whole. As far we are aware, charges have been brought against the Tornado battalion and it has been disbanded. We are convinced that getting rid of these battalions will lead to a qualitative change in the situation in the region and bring us closer to a peaceful settlement of the crisis.

The question regarding demilitarization around Shyrokyne needs to be dealt with as a matter of urgency. Yesterday, a unilateral decision was taken in Donetsk to class Shyrokyne as a demilitarized zone. There will not even be return fire in this area. We regard this as an important gesture of goodwill. It is unilateral action like this that is conducive to a peaceful settlement. We expect this to be followed by an appropriate response. The forthcoming meeting of the working group on security issues will be an important test of Kyiv's willingness to pursue a peaceful solution to the crisis. In the event that it is successful, this scheme could be applied to other hotspots.

The blockade of Donbas flies in the face of the Minsk agreements. Obstacles are being deliberately created to the movement of people from one part of Ukraine to the other. I should like to know why the European Union does not see this or does not want to notice it. Or is its concern about people's freedom of movement selective? There is much talk, including in the SMM reports, about the catastrophic consequences of the blockade. Kyiv has done nothing to rectify this situation. On the contrary, officials and security forces are making a profit from the blockade, demanding bribes if people want to cross the line of contact, on which the toughest procedures have been established. Recently, the security forces boasted that they had confiscated 700 tonnes of food that had been sent to Donbas by rail. These are the good "heroes", whose victims are primarily civilians.

We should like to emphasize once again that carving Donbas out of the Ukrainian economy and society – this is separatism, and what is more separatism at the State level. If our partners are in fact doing anything to convince Kyiv to lift the blockade, we fail to see it.

Statements about Kyiv's allegedly earnest implementation of the Minsk agreements in terms of granting Donbas special status within Ukraine are puzzling. The draft amendments to the Constitution avoid this issue, despite the clear provisions of the Minsk Package of Measures. "No special status for these territories is envisaged in the Constitution" was the official statement by a representative of the Ukrainian presidential administration. What dialogue are we talking about in this case?

Kyiv's Western partners bear particular responsibility for convincing the Ukrainian leadership to adhere to the commitments it has undertaken. Donetsk and Luhansk are ready for this work; the relevant proposals have been sent to Kyiv and the Contact Group but remain unanswered.

The absence of mutual trust between the parties remains the main obstacle to a peaceful settlement. This can be overcome only through fully fledged direct dialogue both in Minsk and on the ground. We trust that the SMM will be able to secure additional results in terms of facilitating dialogue between the individual representatives of the parties to resolve specific humanitarian issues, primarily with regard to local truces.

Any additional agreements on de-escalating tension are to be welcomed. We expect in that regard an agreement to be reached on the withdrawal of all tanks and weapons under 100 mm in calibre. We trust that an exchange of "all for all" will follow the partial exchange of prisoners, with the necessary legal formalities ensured. It is essential to begin to implement point 5 of the Minsk Package of Measures regarding the adoption of the amnesty law.

The question of holding local elections in Donbas remains unresolved. We stress that unilateral action is not enough here. The modalities for the holding of these elections must be agreed upon by Kyiv, Donetsk and Luhansk and formalized in corresponding Ukrainian legislation. Point 4 of the Minsk agreements refers to this. After that there will be a chance for involving the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights in the preparations for the observation of the electoral process.

In response to those who speak of a link between the ceasefire and border control, we once again recall point 9 of the Package of Measures. Restoration of full control of the State border by the Ukrainian Government will take place by the end of 2015 following a comprehensive political settlement, which includes elections and the entry into force of the new Constitution.

Russia supports the Minsk Package of Measures, which is in keeping with our view of crisis resolution, and will continue to work towards its full implementation. We are keen for these measures to be implemented on time so that the situation in Ukraine calms down and the country does not descend into chaos. We, like everyone in Europe, need a prosperous and genuinely independent Ukraine, in which all of its citizens – regardless of where they live or the language they speak – can exercise their rights and freedoms in full measure.

Thank you for your attention.