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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1264th MEETING OF THE PERMANENT COUNCIL
VIA VIDEO TELECONFERENCE**

23 April 2020

**In response to the reports by the Special Representative of the
OSCE Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine and in the Trilateral Contact Group,
Ambassador Heidi Grau, and the Chief Monitor of the OSCE Special Monitoring
Mission to Ukraine, Ambassador Yaşar Halit Çevik**

Mr. Chairperson,

We welcome the distinguished Ambassadors Heidi Grau and Yaşar Halit Çevik to our discussions. Much of what you have said confirms that the settlement of the crisis in Ukraine has started to grind to a halt.

Of course, the exchange of detainees that took place on 16 April between the Ukrainian Government and the authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk was of great importance in humanitarian terms. Over thirty people were given the opportunity to be reunited with their families just before Orthodox Easter. However, this was not an exchange according to the principle of “all for all”, as stipulated in paragraph 6 of the Minsk Package of Measures of 12 February 2015, nor even according to the principle of “all identified for all identified” in line with the directions formulated by the Normandy Four leaders in Paris in December 2019. Unfortunately, the ever so important building of trust between the parties to the internal Ukrainian conflict has yet to take place. This is demonstrated both by the results of yesterday’s meeting of the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) and by the situation on the ground. Violations of the ceasefire regime resulting in further casualties and destruction continue in Donbas. No significant progress has been made in the political sphere or in solving the region’s socio-economic problems.

In Paris in December 2019, the Normandy Four leaders sent clear signals to the parties to the internal Ukrainian conflict regarding the need for immediate measures to stabilize the situation and also regarding the importance of making headway on the political aspects of the Minsk agreements.

Four months later, we have yet to see any progress in strengthening the ceasefire regime, in reaching agreement on three additional disengagement areas with a view to the disengagement of forces and hardware by the end of March this year, in developing and implementing an updated mine clearance plan, in actually opening new checkpoints on the line of contact, etc. We should like to hear your assessments, Ms. Grau and Mr. Çevik, as to what is preventing these tasks from being carried out.

The heads of the “Normandy format” States confirmed the need for the Ukrainian Government to reach agreement with the representatives of the authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk in the TCG on all the legal aspects of the special status of certain areas of Donbas – as indicated in the Package of Measures – to ensure that the special status is implemented on a permanent basis. This involves, among other things, the incorporation of the “Steinmeier formula” into Ukrainian legislation. At the TCG meeting on 11 March, with the OSCE and Russia acting as intermediaries, the parties reached an agreement in principle to establish an advisory board for that purpose. The Ukrainian Government signed a protocol, in accordance with which it was duty-bound – following consultations with the representatives of the OSCE, France and Germany – to ratify the decision (which incidentally had already been agreed upon with the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk) on the establishment of the aforementioned board.

However, already at the next TCG meeting on 26 March, the Ukrainian Government’s negotiators began to backtrack. Then came a public statement by the Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine, Andriy Yermak, saying that the Ukrainian Government “will never conduct negotiations” with the representatives of the republics proclaimed by the people of Donetsk and Luhansk. Contact, he said, would be not with the representatives of Donbas, as stipulated in the Minsk agreements, but with some undefined “residents of the region”. It is typical that the Ukrainian Government – with Deputy Prime Minister Oleksiy Reznikov as its mouthpiece – is justifying the change in its position by invoking the lack of a response from the French and German Governments to the idea of creating an advisory board. We should like to hear what the distinguished Ms. Grau has to say about the reasons for the wrecking of the decision to establish an advisory board and why the “Normandy format” impetus at the highest level is suddenly insufficient for moving forward on the political track.

The conflict in eastern Ukraine has now entered its seventh year. In April 2014, the Maidan authorities sent the security forces and the army into Donbas, aiming artillery and other military hardware at its cities. They used the facade of an “anti-terrorist operation” to hide their true purpose, namely to suppress through violence the dissent of those who rejected the outcome of the coup d’état in Kyiv. Thousands of civilians found themselves in the line of fire during the punitive operation. We recall how, shortly afterwards, Petro Poroshenko, who was inching his way towards power, promised to end the armed conflict in Donbas within a week. Once he became president, he carried on exploiting this idea for five years, but he did not keep his promises and failed to bring peace one jot closer.

Exactly one year ago, Volodymyr Zelenskyi defeated him in the presidential election – and once again there were slogans galore about a speedy settlement and dialogue with the inhabitants of Donbas, and about “winning back hearts and minds”. However, there is still clearly a lack of political will on the part of the Ukrainian Government to overcome the opposition of the “war party”, which is demanding hard-line solutions with regard to the east of the country. Overall, the signals currently coming from the Ukrainian Government and the actions in practice of its representatives in the TCG and of its soldiers in Donbas are not in keeping with the logic of the Minsk agreements.

Further vivid proof of this was the televised address by Mr. Zelenskyi on 17 April, when he outlined his priorities for a settlement. In his opinion, it is important “first of all to get one’s territory” and break through to the border, and only then to start thinking about holding local elections. How does this vision tally with the Minsk Package of Measures and the outcomes of the “Normandy format” summit in Paris? I should like to hear the opinion of the co-sponsors of the Minsk process – our colleagues from France and Germany – on that matter.

Mr. Çevik,

We appreciate your efforts and the work of all the SMM staff to fulfil the Mission's mandate in these difficult conditions arising from the spread of the coronavirus. We trust that, by drawing on its existing resources, the Mission will be able to conduct effective monitoring throughout the territory of Ukraine. At the same time, we are baffled by the attempts to politicize the question of the movement of the SMM monitors across the line of contact and to accuse the Donetsk and Luhansk authorities of all manner of wrongdoings. In this connection, not a word has been mentioned about the fact that the Donbas region is having to combat COVID-19 in the extremely difficult situation of an economic and transport blockade imposed by the Ukrainian Government.

According to information from the representatives of the Donetsk and Luhansk authorities in the TCG in Minsk, the monitors are still able to cross the line of contact into certain areas of Donbas. At a time of increased health and disease control monitoring around the world, the SMM monitors are encouraged to take a number of medical recommendations into account when travelling. By complying with such procedures, as can be seen from the report you presented, Mr. Çevik, SMM paramedics were recently able to access certain areas of Donbas. As far as we are aware, the SMM monitors can enter if they follow the same procedures.

We roundly condemn threats to the safety of the monitors, no matter from whom they come. On 13 April, near the Donetsk filtration station, an SMM patrol positioned outside the railway station in Yasynuvata came under fire. Luckily no one was injured. According to the Mission's information, fire was opened from a westerly direction. It so happens that to the west of the railway station in Yasynuvata, namely on the outskirts of Avdiivka, there are forward positions of the Ukrainian military. The SMM reported that the railway station building and a residential building located a considerable distance away from militia positions were damaged as a result of the shelling. All this confirms that the shelling had no military purpose and was calculated, instead, to intimidate the Mission monitors.

In its report dated 20 April, the Mission confirmed the death of a 25-year-old woman as a result of shelling in the settlement of Shyroka Balka on 9 April. This tragedy would not have happened if the Ukrainian Government had heeded the appeal made in March by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. António Guterres, for a ceasefire in all conflicts in the light of the coronavirus pandemic. It is telling that the Donetsk and Luhansk authorities immediately declared their readiness to heed the UN Secretary-General's appeal, while the Ukrainian Government simply ignored it and carried on shelling. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) regularly presents aggregate data on casualties of the conflict in eastern Ukraine – the latest publication on this topic was issued on 7 April. We would be grateful to Mr. Çevik for information as to when the SMM will be able to release its latest thematic report on casualties and destruction in Donbas. The last such document was published by the Mission in September 2017. This hiatus has dragged on far too long.

We also note the need for timely recording and reflection of this information in the Mission's daily reports. For example, the OHCHR statistics for the first quarter of this year concurred with the data published by the representatives of Donbas. At the same time, the SMM is reporting lower figures and points to the need to clarify data on more than a dozen casualties. In the interests of peace and security in Donbas, we urge the Mission to develop contacts with the local authorities, respond more quickly to reports of shelling and record their consequences.

Furthermore, we expect clear and objective recording by the SMM of the Ukrainian Government's violations of its OSCE commitments in the rest of the country as well, including discrimination in the fields of language and education. The Mission also needs to monitor the attacks on the Ukrainian Orthodox

Church. For example, the arson attack in the early hours of 15 April on the St. Paraskeva of Serbia Church in the village of Lukavtsy (Vyzhnytsia district, Chernivtsi region), as a result of which the church burned to the ground, went unnoticed for some reason.

Ambassadors Grau and Çevik,

The current extraordinary situation as a result of the coronavirus pandemic underscores the need for the parties to the internal Ukrainian conflict to reach compromises quickly. The OSCE's main purpose is to assist them in this as much as possible. It is more important now than ever to think outside the box and abandon hackneyed confrontational narratives. Our common task at the OSCE is to eradicate the logic of war once and for all and ensure the swift implementation of the Minsk Package of Measures, which would open up the prospect of establishing lasting peace in Ukraine.

Thank you for your attention.