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**STATEMENT BY MR. DMITRY BALAKIN,
DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1128th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

19 January 2017

**In response to the statements by the Special Representative of the OSCE
Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine and in the Trilateral Contact Group,
Ambassador Martin Sajdik, and the Chief Monitor of the OSCE Special
Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, Ambassador Ertuğrul Apakan**

Mr. Chairperson,

We thank the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine and in the Trilateral Contact Group, Ambassador Martin Sajdik, and the Chief Monitor of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), Ambassador Ertuğrul Apakan, for their assessments.

We firmly believe that there is no alternative to the comprehensive implementation of the Minsk Package of Measures for a peaceful settlement of the internal Ukrainian crisis. Russia continues to stand ready to facilitate this within the Trilateral Contact Group and in other formats, in the Normandy quartet and through bilateral contacts. Moreover, real progress is possible only through direct dialogue on the part of the Ukrainian authorities with Donetsk and Luhansk.

It is essential to secure a complete ceasefire and the withdrawal of weapons and ensure legal and material guarantees for the inhabitants of Donbas through the enactment of the law on special status and its consolidation in the Ukrainian Constitution, the holding of local elections, and the assurance that people will not be prosecuted in connection with the events in eastern Ukraine.

It will be impossible to reintegrate Donbas into Ukraine without restoring the humanitarian, economic and financial ties that have been severed by the Ukrainian authorities.

Unfortunately, we see no readiness on the part of the Ukrainian authorities to implement the provisions of the Minsk Package of Measures. The results of the first meeting in 2017 of the Trilateral Contact Group and its working groups have confirmed the Ukrainian

Government's determined policy of sabotaging or, at least, putting the brakes on the Minsk process.

The key prerequisites for a comprehensive settlement in line with the Package of Measures are the provision of a legislative framework for the special status of Donbas, the holding of local elections, constitutional reform and an amnesty. However, in the Working Group on Political Issues Ukraine is unwilling to set out on paper either its own position or the so-called Steinmeier formula, which provides for the holding of elections and the enactment of the law on the special status of Donbas.

The tension that the Ukrainian Government maintains on the line of contact is used to justify this destructive position. On the eve of the New Year's truce the Ukrainian armed forces attempted to break through to Debaltseve. The SMM confirms that the Ukrainian armed forces moved their positions forward one kilometre near Svitlodarsk, seized Novoluhanske, brought equipment into the area around Kalynivka and set up firing positions in the village of Vozrozhdeniye. According to the Mission, between 24 December and 16 January, militia-controlled towns and villages were repeatedly subjected to artillery shelling from the directions where Ukrainian armed forces are positioned. Houses were destroyed in Horlivka, Debaltseve, Zhovte, Kalynove, Kominternove, Kulykove, Novooleksandrivka, Vuhlehirsk and Yasynuvata, a civilian was killed in Irmino, and Stanytsia Luhanska, Raivka and Frunze were also hit.

The Ukrainian armed forces are failing to observe the Package of Measures with regard to the withdrawal of military equipment. Between 28 September 2016 and 12 January 2017, the SMM monitors counted 474 units of heavy weaponry belonging to the security forces in the security zone. According to the Mission, only 6 per cent of the equipment meant to have been withdrawn is to be found in the Ukrainian armed forces' depots.

Once again, the Ukrainian Government is delaying the start of the disengagement of forces and hardware in Stanytsia Luhanska.

How are we to interpret the instructions from the Minister of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, Mr. Arsen Avakov, to be prepared to move up to the Russian-Ukrainian border in 2017? It is doubtful that he meant the Ukrainian Government's implementation in good faith of all the conditions for transferring control of the border to the Ukrainian authorities provided for in point 9 of the Package of Measures. It is rather an example of inflating belligerent rhetoric, which undermines the chances of a peaceful settlement.

A further problem is the fact that the Ukrainian armed forces have no control over the so-called volunteer formations such as Right Sector that operate freely along the line of contact.

In the humanitarian field, the Ukrainian Government is desperately hindering the full-scale exchange of hostages and unlawfully detained persons.

We have taken note of the statement by the Vice Prime Minister of Ukraine, Mr. Pavlo Rozenko: the Ukrainian Government will not resume the payment of pensions to Donbas residents. Together with the humanitarian blockade this clearly illustrates the authorities' real attitude to the population of Donbas.

The Ukrainian Government is also blocking the efforts of the Working Group on Economic Issues.

Thus, esteemed colleagues, any complaints about the implementation of the Minsk agreements need to be addressed to the Ukrainian authorities. It doesn't pay to encourage those who are attempting to revise the compromise reached in the Belarusian capital on 12 February 2015. The situation is unlikely to improve unless the Western partners send a strong signal to the Ukrainian authorities. We will continue to hear excuses of "Russian aggression", the militia themselves shelling towns in Donbas and other supposed obstacles to the implementation of the Package of Measures. The only real obstacle is the Ukrainian Government's fear that implementing the Minsk agreements will ruin everything that they have achieved thanks to the Maidan revolution.

In spring 2014, following the visit to Ukraine by the Secretary of State of the United States of America, Mr. Joe Biden, the Ukrainian authorities unleashed a punitive military operation against the people of Donbas. We hope that this time the consequences of a visit to Kyiv by a US guest will not be so tragic.

We should like to take this opportunity once again to express our support for the work of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, which in line with its mandate should be objective and transparent. The safety of the monitors remains one of our priorities. This applies to all monitors regardless of their nationality. The resumed attempts by the Ukrainian security authorities to filter the SMM patrols according to nationality and on this basis to block their access to certain facilities are inadmissible.

We expect monitoring by the SMM to be carried out on an equal and impartial basis on both sides of the line of contact. Monitoring the security zone and the ceasefire regime needs to be strengthened and performed around the clock. The number of monitors at the line of contact and at weapons storage sites could be increased.

We are still awaiting a consolidated thematic report from the SMM on the civilian victims and destruction of key civilian infrastructure facilities throughout the conflict.

It is largely the Ukrainian armed forces that are restricting the monitors' freedom of movement. According to the SMM, between 28 September 2016 and 12 January 2017, the Ukrainian security forces hindered the monitors' work outside the disengagement areas on 294 occasions. This amounts to 60 per cent of the total number of restrictions on the SMM's freedom of movement. We see no particular problems regarding access to the border territories – between 24 December and 16 January the monitors visited the checkpoint that is not controlled by the Ukrainian authorities on 24 occasions. Nothing out of the ordinary was reported.

The SMM's mandate covers not only Donbas but also the other regions of Ukraine and Kyiv. The situation in Ukraine in general requires closer attention from the SMM, as it increasingly affects the prospects for the implementation of the Minsk agreements. There needs to be more consistent monitoring of the observance of human rights, freedom of speech and expression, manifestations of aggressive nationalism and extremism, the clampdown on Russian language and culture at the national and local levels, and attacks on the Orthodox Church.

These topics deserve coverage not only in the SMM's daily reporting but also in separate thematic reports. The SMM's staffing and analytical capacity are more than adequate for this. The participating States are entitled to receive more information and analysis from the Mission.

In conclusion, allow me once again to thank Ambassadors Sajdik and Apakan and to extend our sincere words of gratitude to all the co-ordinators of the Minsk Trilateral Contact Group's working groups and all the monitors from the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine.

Thank you for your attention.