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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1087th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

28 January 2016

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

Mr. Chairperson,
Ambassadors Apakan and Sajdik,

We are pleased to welcome you once again to the OSCE Permanent Council meeting and thank you for your detailed reports.

Russia's position on resolving the Ukrainian crisis remains unchanged. The key here is comprehensive implementation of the Minsk Package of Measures, and this is now in the hands of the Ukrainian Government. Real progress on all issues, including political ones, is possible only through dialogue between the actual parties to the conflict, namely Kyiv, Donetsk and Luhansk. Russia remains willing to assist in that dialogue.

A full ceasefire and the withdrawal of weapons are needed. The problem is that Ukraine is deliberately encouraging tension along the line of contact in Donbas. Its military preparations, the rotation of troops, the appearance of new equipment and the presence of nationalist battalions in the security zone attest to this. Reports that foreign mercenaries are also appearing there are alarming.

The fact that the Ukrainian representatives to the Joint Centre for Control and Co-ordination suddenly left Donetsk is disturbing. In our view, this step undermines the work to facilitate the implementation of the Addendum to the Package of Measures and mediation efforts to establish dialogue on mine clearance and reconstruction.

We should like to take this opportunity to reiterate our support for the work of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) and its mandate, which takes full account of the situation in present-day Ukraine. It is essential to remain professional and impartial and to avoid politically-charged assessments. The SMM reports are very useful and we thank the monitors for their dedicated work. The priority should be to provide balanced

monitoring in the security zone on both sides of the line of contact. We welcome the opening of new forward patrol bases.

The Mission has already acquired a wealth of experience, which puts it in good stead to use its technical and human resources more efficiently. Smart operations are needed – doing more with less.

At the end of last year, Ukrainian forces occupied the settlements of Pavlopil, Psychevyk and Zaitseve in the “grey zone”, thus changing the geography of the line of contact. There has been an increase in the military presence of the Ukrainian armed forces in Toshivka and Popasna. The Ukrainians are conducting military exercises involving live firing in Trokhizbenka and Mykolaiv on a daily basis. The amount of military equipment “missing” from Ukrainian armed forces’ depots has grown (between 25 December 2015 and 24 January 2016 180 pieces went missing, including multiple-launch rocket systems). The updated heavy weapons list submitted by the Ukrainians on 13 January contained 300 fewer items than had been declared on the previous occasion on 29 November 2015.

Shelling has intensified in the vicinity of the hotspots of Horlivka, Donetsk airport and Kominternove.

There needs to be increased monitoring of depots, training ranges and Ukrainian troop movements in areas bordering Donbas – the Zaporizhia, Dnipropetrovsk and Kharkiv regions.

The SMM is a valuable instrument for developing dialogue on the ground, and this can serve as a warning of an escalation of tension and forestall it. We call on the Mission to work more actively to establish direct contacts between Ukrainian army and Donbas militia commanders. This will help to prevent an escalation of tension, which is important for mine clearance and infrastructure restoration work.

We note the SMM’s role in developing co-operation between the leaders in certain regions and the International Committee of the Red Cross, which does not have problems with accreditation, the delivery of humanitarian aid or the permanent presence of its international and local staff. We are confident that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees will also be able to deal with these formalities and expand its area of operation to cover the entire territory of Donbas.

It is time finally to draw attention to the situation of the population in the Government-controlled territory in Donbas. The security forces, especially fighters from volunteer battalions effectively “feed off” these settlements. It is possible that the capture of additional settlements in the “neutral zone” was linked to the desire to make a profit. During “cleansing operations”, not only are there checks to see whether people sympathize with the separatists, but also ordinary theft and looting.

The criminal excesses of right-wing radicals and nationalists have been tormenting all of Ukraine for two years now. There needs to be a thorough assessment of this, including by the SMM in a detailed thematic report. Generally speaking, the topic should be reflected in the SMM reports on a permanent basis.

Radical nationalists continue to have a major influence on the central and local authorities, pressurizing law enforcement agencies and exerting a powerful impact on the justice system. The rule of law is incompatible with the requirements that people detained on suspicion of serious crimes be released simply because they claim to be “patriots”.

We are receiving ever more frequent reports of religious and cultural oppression in western Ukraine, attacks on priests, the seizing of churches and attempts to confiscate property, for example, in the village of Ptycha in the Rivne region.

There has still been no satisfactory investigation into the “sniper incident” on the Maidan, the burning of people at Trade Union House in Odessa, the shooting of people in Mariupol and other crimes by so-called “patriots”. We share the views of the Council of Europe Special Commission, which deemed the investigation conducted by the Ukrainian law enforcement authorities not to have been satisfactory.

We do not hear the Ukrainian Government being asked any questions about freedom of expression when it concerns so-called “domestic separatism” or disagreement with the nationalist policy of the “Maidan victors”.

Will those guilty of murdering the journalist Oles Buzina be punished? The journalist Ruslan Kotsaba has been in pretrial detention for around a year and is facing up to 15 years’ imprisonment for expressing a viewpoint that differs from the official line of the Ukrainian Government. However, this is of no interest to our Western colleagues since it does nothing to help crank up the myth of the “Russian threat”.

Ambassadors,
Colleagues,

We attach exceptional importance to the work of the Trilateral Contact Group and its specialist subgroups. We are grateful to Ambassador Sajdik and the other OSCE representatives, who are working to assist the parties in the practical implementation of the agreements.

Unfortunately, the progress leaves a lot to be desired. The authorities in Kyiv are, however, blatantly trying to delay implementation of the political part of the Minsk agreements – the granting of permanent special status to Donbas, agreement on a law governing local elections, and constitutional reform. We see a persistent unwillingness to implement the paragraph dealing with the amnesty and the fact that there should be no prosecution in connection with the events that took place in Donbas.

The pretext used for this is that the continuing tension at the line of contact is allegedly the militias’ fault. This is not consistent with the facts or the SMM reports. In accordance with the Package of Measures, the political track is completely separate and should be implemented within the Trilateral Contact Group, not to mention, without any linkages or preconditions.

With each passing day, the Ukrainian people, and primarily the civilian population, pay an ever higher price for this. The proliferation of weapons across Ukraine and possibly beyond its borders is cause for concern.

Agreement with the representatives of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions on questions concerning local elections is the primary issue. This is what is written in point 12 of the Package of Measures. Once again, it needs to be explicitly stated that the Ukrainian Government does not have any other partners in this regard apart from the signatories to that document, the representatives of Donbas. Elections are held on Ukrainian territory and in accordance with Ukrainian law.

We are surprised at the Ukrainian representatives' doubts regarding the need for a new law on elections in Donbas. The existing legislation was not agreed upon with the representatives of the regions, as required by the Package of Measures, and does not meet the demands of the current situation. Even the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights has noted its serious shortcomings. It does not cover a number of key aspects, including the voting procedure for people forced to leave Donbas.

We are following the subject of constitutional reform in Ukraine. The Package of Measures stipulates the adoption of a new constitution providing for decentralization as a key element (taking into account the special characteristics of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, agreed upon with the representatives of these areas) and the adoption of permanent legislation on special statuses. Thus, amendments that do not imply the inclusion in the Constitution of provisions on the permanent special status of Donbas and that have not been agreed upon with it cannot be regarded as the implementation of the Minsk commitments by the Ukrainian Government.

We know that the authorities in Kyiv are capable of implementing the Minsk agreements and trust that our Western partners will offer them the necessary support in this, including through the OSCE.

In conclusion, let me once again thank the distinguished Ambassadors Apakan and Sajdik for their difficult but extremely important work and wish them every success.

Thank you for your attention.