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Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY
MR. MAXIM BUYAKEVICH, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1382nd MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

14 July 2022

On the situation regarding the fight against illicit drugs in the OSCE area

Mr. Chairperson,

We are concerned about the current situation as regards combating illicit drug trafficking in the OSCE's area of responsibility.

The Russian Federation is committed to strict compliance with its obligations under the three United Nations drug control conventions, which form the basis of the existing global drug control regime. Unfortunately, in recent years, these foundations have been undermined by certain countries that, while remaining parties to the conventions, are deliberately violating the basic commitment to limit the production and use of drugs exclusively to medical and scientific purposes.

The legalization of the trade in cannabis for non-medical purposes in countries such as the United States of America, Canada and a number of European Union Member States is cause for serious concern. We consider such an approach to be inadmissible.

The World Drug Report 2022 confirms that countries and jurisdictions that have legalized recreational cannabis use are experiencing a steady increase in its use and in the associated negative consequences for health, including mental disorders and even instances of suicide. The perceived harmlessness of cannabis is a dangerous myth that exacerbates the drug situation in individual countries and in the world as a whole.

The threat of opiates and synthetic drugs being smuggled from Afghanistan remains extremely serious. For the fifth consecutive year, the country has seen record opium poppy harvests. The grave humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, which was triggered by the hasty evacuation of NATO member countries' military contingents and the subsequent freezing by Western countries of the Afghan Government's financial assets, is forcing ever broader segments of that country's population to turn to the drug business for their basic survival. Increased drug flows from Afghanistan along traditional routes add a considerable element of instability to the efforts to ensure the OSCE area's security. In that connection, we consider it important to step up the activities of the field operations in Central Asia, particularly with regard to training law enforcement experts in key countries to help to curb this threat.

Mr. Chairperson,

The situation on the anti-drug front is also difficult in Ukraine. In recent years, with the connivance of its authorities, the territory of that country has gradually become one of the most prized drug corridors from Asia to Europe. This is also confirmed in no small measure by the information provided in the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime report “Conflict in Ukraine: Key evidence on drug demand and supply”, which was published on 8 April 2022.

The report’s authors draw attention to the emergence around 2006–2016 of a Ukrainian offshoot of the “Balkan” and “northern” routes as an additional and self-sufficient branch. Between 2018 and 2020, the heroin supply channel from Afghanistan took shape along the following chain: Iran – the Caucasus countries (notably Azerbaijan and Georgia) – the Black Sea – Ukraine – Poland and Romania.

Furthermore, the report notes a steady increase in seizures of heroin destined for EU countries via Ukraine from 2002 to 2021. The largest seizure of heroin in Ukraine took place in January 2021 in Lviv (1,035 kg). In order to forestall any insinuations, we should like to emphasize that this pernicious trend had already been observed long before the start of the special military operation.

Thus, when undertaking measures to counter illicit drug trafficking in the Russian-Ukrainian border area in 2021, it was noted that the operating environment had become significantly more complicated. In the Belgorod, Bryansk and Kursk regions, there was a manifold increase in seizures of synthetic drugs and marijuana produced in clandestine laboratories in the Sumy and Kharkiv regions.

In the course of the special military operation in Ukraine, members of the people’s militia units of the People’s Republics of Luhansk and Donetsk are finding not only foreign weapons in the liberated or abandoned territories, in the strongpoints, fortified areas, bunkers and long-term firing points, but also empty used disposable syringes, tourniquets, gauze swabs and other typical signs of drug use in the ranks of the Ukrainian armed formations. Frequently discovered substances include methadone, amphetamine and salts.

The concomitant effects of the use of such psychotropic drugs are a blunted sense of fear, a lowered pain threshold and a euphoric mood. There are numerous testimonies and statements from members of Ukrainian formations who have surrendered to the law enforcement authorities which suggest that more than half of the personnel of the Ukrainian armed formations use, to some degree or another, combat-enhancing drugs, which were distributed directly by senior officers. According to information received from residents of the liberated territories, members of the Ukrainian armed formations also repeatedly attempted to offload these drugs among the local population.

Furthermore, not only the drugs themselves have been found in the liberated territories, but also clandestine chemical drug laboratories, where the drugs were synthesized and manufactured on-site. For example, such a laboratory was discovered following the liberation of the village of Sopyne near Mariupol. It produced the cheapest drugs on a massive scale to meet the needs of fighters from the nationalist and territorial defence battalions.

It is fair to assume that, in the medium term, we should expect a considerable increase in the number of drug-dependent persons with practical combat experience. The fact that there might be an absence of basic institutions for psychological, social and substance abuse rehabilitation, treatment and reintegration into peaceful life will be a major factor in the rapid worsening of the situation in society, leading to a sharp exacerbation of crime not only in Ukraine, but also in the context of migration processes in all the countries of the European Union and beyond.

Paradoxically, at present, the OSCE can hardly boast of any kind of contribution to resolving the global drug problem. Despite having a solid mandate and an extensive set of commitments, in recent years, thanks largely to the systematic efforts of certain Western countries, this issue has been effectively shelved. Moreover, the Polish Chairmanship postponed indefinitely and in fact effectively cancelled the traditional anti-drug conference that was due to take place just last week. Such an approach by individual participating States, and likewise by the Secretariat's specialized unit, to this cross-border phenomenon, which poses a direct threat to the lives and health of our citizens, once again illustrates the OSCE's detachment from real, pressing problems and challenges as it gives precedence to frequently politicized and pointless dialogue. We categorically disagree with this approach and propose that together we should think about raising the Organization's profile in the highly topical field of combating drugs.

Thank you for your attention.