

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1135th 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,

Despite everything that is currently happening in Ukraine, we regard the Minsk agreements as the only framework for a peaceful settlement. Their implementation requires the political will of the Ukrainian Government, which is for now absent, and direct dialogue in good faith with Donetsk and Luhansk, which the Ukrainian Government is continuing to avoid.

We all read the reports by the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM). There is no point trying to manipulate the statistics regarding the shelling. The monitors verified the information on the attempt by the Ukrainian armed forces to seize the Donetsk filtration plant. On 24 February, an SMM unmanned aerial vehicle recorded damage to the chlorine storage building caused by an 82 mm mortar round fired from a northerly direction, in other words from positions held by the Ukrainian armed forces. According to SMM data alone, between 17 and 28 February, militia-controlled towns and villages were shelled on nine occasions from positions where security forces are stationed. As a result of this, a woman was injured in Krasnyi Partizan, and houses were destroyed or damaged in Yasynuvata, Kominternove, Olenivka and Zolote-5. Between 17 and 28 February, the monitors discovered 75 units of military equipment belonging to the Ukrainian armed forces in violation of the Package of Measures and the Addendum to it. In addition, over 100 armoured personnel carriers belonging to the security forces were recorded at the line of contact, and around 200 units of Ukrainian armed forces' military equipment immediately behind the withdrawal lines.

The increasingly critical situation at the line of contact is being provoked by those who benefit from it – the authorities in Kyiv. An end to the shelling and the withdrawal of weapons would give the inhabitants of Donetsk and Luhansk an opportunity to restore everything that has been destroyed by the Ukrainian forces' shelling, it would mean a calm and peaceful life, getting on with their everyday lives, making preparations for elections and for the continued implementation of all the aspects of the Package of Measures.

In such a situation, however, the Ukrainian Government's chances of blaming the numerous domestic problems involving corruption, the population's deteriorating economic situation and political chaos on the hostilities would be dramatically reduced. Furthermore, this would mean the need to implement the political commitments. It would be necessary to enact the law on special status, revive the negotiations on the modalities for local elections, formalize the amnesty and, most importantly, carry out constitutional reform. The Ukrainian Government obviously does not want this and that is why it is sabotaging the implementation of the Minsk agreements. Even the unilateral amendments to the Constitution, which were not agreed upon with Donbas, have been frozen. They were adopted by the Verkhovna Rada at their first reading on 31 August 2015, but there has been no progress since then.

This is confirmed by Ukraine's refusal once again at yesterday's Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) meeting to discuss the "Steinmeier formula" under contrived pretexts.

There are considerable doubts in general regarding the willingness of the authorities in Kyiv to reach an agreement. No matter how many truces have been agreed, the Ukrainian Government has wrecked each of them. In February alone, the parties reached agreement on the withdrawal of weapons beginning on 5 February, then on 20 February, but to no avail. The Ukrainian Government continues to maintain tension at the line of contact. The Donetsk filtration plant came under mortar fire and was then seized. On 27 February, Donetsk proposed conducting a synchronized withdrawal of forces, but the Ukrainian Government is once again trying to get out of this. As long ago as at the TCG videoconference on 26 January, it was proposed that a weapon-and-troop-free zone be established around the Donetsk filtration plant. This proposal has been repeated on many occasions, but when it comes to the Ukrainian Government it continues to fall on deaf ears.

Hope nevertheless remains. We trust that this time the Ukrainian Government will not disrupt the disengagement of forces in the Stanytsia Luhanska area, which is scheduled for 7 March. Our call for the withdrawal of heavy weapons from the line of contact as soon as possible also remains valid. The claims that Ukraine has allegedly withdrawn all the weapons mentioned in the lists transmitted to the SMM are not in keeping with reality. The SMM data disproves these claims.

We support the SMM's intention to monitor the situation along the line of contact more closely and to use additional technical equipment to record ceasefire violations and monitor the situation in the disengagement areas. The vast resources at the SMM's disposal, which are comparable to the entire OSCE Unified Budget, make it possible to build up the capabilities that have proven most effective. We remain confident that investing such funds in the SMM means that we can expect more detailed reporting. This applies not only to the conflict zone, but also to the rest of the Ukrainian territory.

We are rightly paying a great deal of attention to the humanitarian situation in Donbas. The Ukrainian Government's policy indicates that it needs the territory but not the people living there. How else can one explain the ban on the operation of the banking system, the dismantling of the system for social and pension payments in the region, the denial of access to the all-Ukrainian official register of births, deaths and marriages, the hampering of transportation and vital systems such as water, gas and electricity supply, and the creation of artificial obstacles preventing people from crossing the line of contact? One cannot but

remember President Petro Poroshenko's notorious slogans – “their children will sit in basements, and that is how we win this war”.

The Ukrainian Government's inhumane attitude to the inhabitants of Donbas – if anyone has still not discerned this from the systematic and indiscriminate shelling of residential areas – is fully revealed by the blockade on all forms of trade with Donbas. Lifting the blockade is a demand not only of the Donbas population, but is also a co-ordinated request of the Normandy quartet, with which, as we understand, the Ukrainian Government is also in agreement. However, in practice, the authorities have condoned the blockade and made the situation even worse. One of those behind the blockade, the member of the Verkhovna Rada, Semen Semenchenko, announced in his video blog today that if coal from Donbas is delivered to Ukraine via Russian territory, anti-terrorist operation fighters will block the eight main railway lines at the border.

The Ukrainian Government has gotten out of meeting its obligations vis-à-vis the people of Donbas and does not want to reintegrate the region into its legal framework under the conditions agreed in the Minsk Package of Measures. The Government has deprived a significant number of Ukrainian citizens of the possibility of exercising a range of fundamental rights by refusing to issue them with the necessary documents. The Donetsk and Luhansk authorities have been forced to compensate for this shortcoming by issuing their own documents.

The decree of the President of the Russian Federation of 18 February 2017 on the recognition of documents and vehicle registration plates issued to Ukrainian citizens and stateless persons permanently residing in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine is intended to enable them to fully exercise their rights and freedoms. Nobody can fully exercise their rights if their personal identification documents, education certificates, and birth and marriage certificates are not recognized.

This humanitarian step in no way violates the Minsk agreements and does not even complicate their implementation. On the contrary, it gives the inhabitants of Donbas additional confidence in tomorrow, an opportunity to satisfy their basic needs, and it gives the authorities in Kyiv another reason to think about the need to stop delaying the granting of the promised special status to certain areas in Donbas.

Unlike the Ukrainian Government, for whom turning off the water and electricity supply is one of its preferred tools, Russia proceeds primarily from humanitarian considerations. There is nothing prohibiting us from recognizing the basic documents necessary for citizens to exercise their rights and freedoms, issued by authorities that do not enjoy international recognition. Such precedents exist.

We remind you that this is a temporary measure until there is a political settlement of the situation in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions pursuant to the Minsk agreements.

What is really complicating the implementation of the Minsk agreements are the unsound arguments for transferring control of the border before the local elections and other fantasy ideas that contravene the spirit and the letter of the Package of Measures.

Thank you for your attention.