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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
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1296th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL
VIA VIDEO TELECONFERENCE**

17 December 2020

On the situation in Ukraine and the need to implement the Minsk agreements

Mr. Chairperson,

At the end of December, it will be two years since the current President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, announced his decision to enter politics. He pledged to bring the conflict in eastern Ukraine to an end as soon as possible and to facilitate a qualitative improvement in the lives of the majority of the country's citizens. Many people hoped that the promised changes would bring about an improvement in their situation. Regrettably, however, the year 2020, which is now drawing to a close, has been another year of missed opportunities for Ukraine to address the chronic problems inherited from the post-Maidan authorities.

I refer, first and foremost, to the situation in the eastern regions of Ukraine. Despite a number of half measures that have helped to somewhat reduce tensions in Donbas, the policy of the Ukrainian authorities towards the inhabitants of the region remains more or less unchanged. The arguments about striving to "win back the hearts and minds of the people of Donbas" have still not been translated into specific legislative and practical steps aimed at swiftly fulfilling the commitments under the Minsk Package of Measures of 12 February 2015. The shameful socio-economic blockade of the region continues and overwhelmingly affects the most socially vulnerable sections of the population. Even during the pandemic, the Ukrainian authorities have not taken steps to lift the blockade.

Throughout the year, the Ukrainian Government has conducted an energetic campaign to discredit a number of the provisions of the key instrument for a settlement, namely the Package of Measures endorsed by United Nations Security Council resolution 2202 and recognized by the international community as the only framework for achieving peace in Donbas. Ukraine's representatives have gradually switched from talking about the supposed need for its "modernization" to direct calls for the document to be rewritten.

It is not surprising that against this backdrop the voices of those advocating an alternative solution to the so-called "Donbas problem" involving the use of force have continued to gather strength. Supporters of the "war party" not only continue to hold responsible positions in the Government but are also actively calling for the enactment of such a scenario. The comment made last week by General Serhiy Kryvonos, Deputy Secretary of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine, in an interview with the

Ukrainian publication *Obozrevatel* is remarkable. He stated that, as he understands things, in order to achieve peace, a clear focus must be set “on separatism and collaborationism, the fifth column crushed and Ukraine’s armed forces and its own people prepared to defend and liberate our lands”. In other words, the so-called “liberation” is evidently envisaged by military means. And not a word about dialogue with the representatives of certain areas regarding a political settlement, which the Package of Measures explicitly stipulates.

It must be acknowledged that over this past year the Ukrainian Government has done little more than pay lip service to making progress in resolving the political aspects. The only thing that the Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian Parliament) has been able to do is to formally extend the law on the special status of Donbas by one year. On 15 December, a single change was made to its text, simply replacing 2020 with 2021. I would remind you that this instrument was adopted more than six years ago and has not been in force for a single day so far. Back in March 2015, its entry into force was made subject to conditions that conflicted with the Package of Measures and made its practical application impossible. There has been no progress either in attempts to enact this law under the compromise “Steinmeier formula” agreed in writing by the representatives of the Ukrainian Government and the authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk in the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) in October 2019. Despite the calls from the “Normandy format” summit in Paris on 9 December 2019 to incorporate this formula into Ukrainian legislation, the Government of Ukraine remains inactive, not to mention the fact that the status law is not permanent, as stipulated by the Minsk agreements. There has also been no progress in anchoring the details of self-government in Donbas in the Constitution of Ukraine.

What has been done in this context? The Ukrainian authorities are systematically excluding Donbas residents from participating in the political processes in the country. This is even true of those people living in Government-controlled territories, where, for example, the Ukrainian authorities barred some half a million people from taking part in the local elections in October. As for certain areas of Donbas, the Ukrainian Government’s negotiators continue to avoid reaching agreement in the TCG with the real representatives of these areas on modalities for holding local elections there as well.

The Ukrainian Government has openly stated that there will be no amnesty as stipulated in the Minsk agreements for those who were involved in the events in Donbas, and that instead of providing political guarantees to the population of the region, the concept of “transitional justice” will be applied. As reported, work on the relevant draft law, which is scheduled to be submitted in the first quarter of 2021, is continuing under the leadership of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Reintegration, Oleksiy Reznikov. Back in September, he explained that the document would contain provisions on certain “collaborators”. Here we might also recall the Ukrainian Government’s draft law submitted to the Verkhovna Rada in November containing provisions on the forced resettlement of citizens of those countries regarded as an “aggressor State” by the Ukrainian Government. All of this is nothing more than another attempt to divide the people of Donbas, and in principle the inhabitants of all of Ukraine, into “right” and “wrong” for the purpose of further suppression of dissent, including by means of force.

Mr. Chairperson,

We are grateful to the Albanian Chairmanship for organizing a briefing on 14 December by the Chief Monitor of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine and Co-ordinator of the TCG Security Working Group, Yaşar Halit Çevik. In assessing the pace of the working group’s work, he acknowledged that further headway in the security dialogue was linked to progress on the political aspects. Meanwhile, earlier in the “Normandy format”, the Ukrainian Government reiterated its understanding that political and security issues were closely interlinked and must be resolved simultaneously. As you know, the authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk have not disputed this and back in October put forward their own road map for

overcoming the impasse in the negotiations. I might add that so far there has been no reaction at all from the Ukrainian Government.

The TCG meeting on 16 December once again confirmed the lack of political will on the part of the Ukrainian Government for a peaceful settlement on the basis of the Package of Measures. No concrete decisions were adopted. The Ukrainian negotiators continue to impose conditions that have nothing to do with the logic, letter and spirit of the Package of Measures.

Against this background, the Ukrainian authorities continue to trample on fundamental human rights and freedoms. There are no signs of an improvement in the situation. We draw attention to the report by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia published last week on the human rights situation in Ukraine, which provides a comprehensive analysis of the most notable violations. These include discrimination and persecution of national minorities, abuses by the security forces, multiple violations of the social and economic rights of inhabitants, discrimination against believers and the clergy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, and restrictions on the media through censorship, pressure and persecution of journalists. Of particular concern are manifestations of aggressive nationalism, racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia, and the glorification of the Nazis and their accomplices.

Look at the concept of the State Target Programme for National-Patriotic Education for the period until 2025, approved by the Government of Ukraine in October. In particular, it calls for continued State support for organizations advocating the idea of Ukrainian national exclusivity. The results of this policy are already making themselves felt: on 10 December, a supporter of radical ideas publicly desecrated a Hanukkah symbol erected in one of the city squares in Kyiv – at the height of the Jewish religious holiday.

The country continues to glorify Nazi collaborators from among the ranks of Ukrainian nationalist organizations during the Second World War and officially commemorates the “memorable dates” associated with them. On 16 December, the Verkhovna Rada adopted a resolution approving the calendar of such dates for 2021. It is noteworthy that on the same day, at a plenary meeting of the 75th session of the United Nations General Assembly, as in previous years, Ukraine, together with the United States of America, voted against the resolution on combating glorification of Nazism, neo-Nazism and other practices that contribute to fuelling contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Against this background, it is not surprising that, sensing their impunity, Ukrainian right-wing radicals continue to use violence and intimidate political opponents, civil society activists, human rights defenders, journalists and members of various ethnic groups.

We reiterate that the ongoing crisis in Ukraine is the result of the February 2014 coup d'état, which was orchestrated, funded and organized from abroad and has led to the armed confrontation in Donbas and the wholesale suffering of millions of civilians.

We call on the international community, including the OSCE and Ukraine's external “minders”, to exercise as fully as possible their undeniable influence on that country's leadership so as to induce it to act in the interests of peace and civil accord on the basis of the fulfilment in good faith of its commitments under international law, including with regard to the settlement of the conflict in the eastern regions of Ukraine

Thank you for your attention.