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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE
1311th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL
VIA VIDEO TELECONFERENCE**

29 April 2021

Seventh anniversary of the Odessa massacre of 2 May 2014

Madam Chairperson,

Every week at the Permanent Council we discuss the difficult situation in Ukraine, which has come about as a result of the anti-constitutional coup d'état of February 2014 that triggered massive violations of human rights throughout the country, the persecution of dissent, a clampdown on freedom of the media, and pandering to aggressive nationalism and neo-Nazism. The radical nationalist ideas that thrived in the wake of the Maidan awakened repulsion among a significant share of the population and led to a profound divide in Ukrainian society. The Ukrainian Government decided not to go easy on those who demurred; rather, it staked everything on violent methods for the suppression of dissent. This culminated in the punitive operation against the people of Donbas, which is inflicting suffering on millions.

Today we wish to recall how the bloody cycle of intolerance and violence in Ukraine was set in motion. Seven years ago, on 2 May 2014, a tragedy occurred in Odessa the likes of which had not been seen in modern Europe since the atrocities of the Nazis during the Second World War. With the connivance of the Maidan authorities, right-wing radicals committed an exceptionally cruel mass murder. Scores of people were burned alive in the city's Trade Union House: they perished in this way simply because they did not agree with the ideology of hatred espoused by the supporters of the coup d'état and decided to stand up for their rights, freedoms and convictions.

In all, no fewer than 48 people died on that day at the hands of combatants from ultra-nationalist and neo-Nazi groups, including Right Sector and Maidan Self-Defence. Most of them burned to death or suffered carbon monoxide poisoning as they found themselves trapped inside the building, with the nationalists outside hurling petrol bombs at the windows and no one stopping them. Those who tried to escape from the fire were cruelly dispatched outside the walls of the building. Video footage of these dreadful events is publicly available.

The scale and horrendous circumstances of these violent deaths caused shock and indignation both in Ukraine and abroad. Yet, the numerous calls for this tragedy to be fully investigated have to this day failed to induce the Ukrainian authorities to establish all the details and bring the perpetrators to justice. No headway was made either following the realignment of power in Ukraine in 2019.

The Ukrainian Government speaks of being determined to build a democratic society based on the observance of human rights and the rule of law. One would expect the authorities to deploy all their resources to investigate that shameful chapter in their country's history – something that would serve as an important step towards domestic reconciliation. However, this has as yet not happened. It seems that what matters most to the Ukrainian leadership is to hold on to power, and for that purpose they are prepared to pander to neo-Nazis and radicals. It is not surprising that the instigators and perpetrators of the mass murder in Odessa continue to be shielded persistently in Ukraine.

As far back as 2015, the International Advisory Panel on Ukraine of the Council of Europe pointed out that the Ukrainian authorities' investigation of the tragic events that had taken place in Odessa did not satisfy the requirements of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms or the criteria of independence, effectiveness, thoroughness and reasonable expedition. The failure to achieve any results in the investigation and, consequently, the complete impunity that has prevailed in this case have also been regularly noted at the United Nations. In a recent report by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights dated 11 March 2021, it was recognized yet again that the investigation of the aforementioned tragic events "ha[s] not visibly progressed".

What is more, instead of bringing to justice those responsible for setting fire to the Trade Union House in Odessa, the Ukrainian authorities have begun to persecute the victims along with those who tried somehow to prevent the violence. The head of the Main Regional Department for Odessa of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine at the time, Dmitry Fuchedzhi, was among those who found themselves persecuted and was forced to flee the country. In his interviews about those events he openly ascribed them to provocation by the Kyiv authorities, as a result of whose actions the local law enforcement officers had been unable to prevent the disturbances. The revelations by Vasily Prozorov, a former officer of the Ukrainian Security Service, are equally instructive: he stated that the Ukrainian intelligence services at the very least knew in advance of the events of 2 May 2014 in Odessa and may actually even have organized them. By the way, Andriy Parubiy, who at the time was serving as Secretary of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine, arrived in Odessa on 29 May 2014 – that is, literally on the eve of the tragedy – the official reason being that it was for the purpose of "holding a meeting of the crisis centre tasked with emergency response measures in response to challenges and threats to national security". Significantly, hundreds of Maidan supporters had arrived in the city the day before, and Mr. Parubiy, the former "commander of Maidan", duly made a tour of their checkpoints in his new capacity.

It is necessary to establish the facts and provide an assessment of these and all the other circumstances of that terrible crime, including obtaining an answer to the question as to why fire brigade teams were for a long time not allowed to approach the Trade Union House, which was engulfed in fire and where people were perishing in the flames. We call on the OSCE and all international partners to exert as much pressure as possible on the Ukrainian Government with a view to ensuring that a comprehensive investigation is conducted.

The hatred that was kindled in Ukraine back then has not abated to this day. Shortly after the Odessa tragedy, one could read the following on the website of Right Sector, a Ukrainian extremist organization: "This is yet another glorious day in our nation's history." In subsequent years, Ukrainian radicals protested against honouring those who had lost their lives at the time; they set fire to the wreaths and photographs of the victims that were placed at the improvised memorial near the scene of the massacre. Most recently, on 6 April, they organized a demonstration against the decision by the Odessa district council to put up a plaque in honour of those killed.

The frenzy of aggressive nationalism and neo-Nazism in Ukraine has since then been taking ever more monstrous forms. Torchlit processions by radicals taking place with the connivance of the authorities, the naming of streets in honour of Nazi accomplices, the official introduction of “notable dates” to commemorate them – all these are signs of a very dangerous tendency of abetting at the State level the revival of hate ideology in the country. Yesterday, on 28 April, radicals held a march to commemorate the creation of the Ukrainian Galicia SS Division. And this was not in some backwater, but in Kyiv itself, not far from Babi Yar, where SS units carried out a mass shooting of Jews in the autumn of 1941.

We call on the OSCE structures to monitor closely the manifestations of aggressive nationalism in Ukraine and to respond to them promptly in accordance with their mandates. This is also a direct responsibility of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), which in line with its mandate must “monitor and support respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the rights of persons belonging to national minorities”. We expect the SMM to provide information objectively – without glossing over anything – on all manifestations of radical nationalism and neo-Nazism in Ukraine. Moreover, the scale of the problem means that a special thematic report by the Mission summarizing the trends and the abundant facts has long been overdue.

Europe once before paid a very high price for the impunity enjoyed by far-right radicals. Neo-Nazism should not be allowed to rear its ugly head on our continent today.

Thank you for your attention.