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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1272nd MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

18 June 2020

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

Mr. Chairperson,

The crisis settlement process in Ukraine has itself become a crisis situation. More precisely, the tactic selected by the Ukrainian Government over the past few weeks has pushed the process into a deadlock. While professing their commitment in principle to the Minsk agreements, Ukraine's officials and the representatives of the Ukrainian Government in the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) are demonstratively disregarding them in practice, seeking to play down the importance of the agreements and trying at the same time to marginalize the actual Minsk negotiation platform as well.

During the TCG videoconference on 15 June, the deputy head of the Ukrainian delegation, Oleksandr Merezhko, declared that the Minsk Package of Measures of 12 February 2015 is "advisory in nature" and does not impose any obligations on Ukraine. Earlier, the first deputy head of the Ukrainian delegation at the TCG, Oleksiy Reznikov, noted that the Minsk agreements are, as he put it, "merely political arrangements" that do not carry any legal weight. The Ukrainian representatives are making such statements despite the fact that the Package of Measures was approved by United Nations Security Council resolution 2202 and remains the only framework for a settlement in Ukraine based on international law.

All of this is evidence of the Ukrainian Government's intention to reshape or even undermine the entire negotiation process, notably through its attempts to oust the real representatives of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Regrettably, all this is taking place with the complete complicity of our "Normandy format" partners. Statements heard from the Ukrainian capital that have nothing to do with the plans for implementing the Package of Measures in good faith do not meet with any criticism or condemnation. In fact, the Ukrainian authorities have been granted a kind of indulgence to continue sabotaging the Minsk agreements. It is significant that after their visit to Berlin on 2 June, and Paris on 12 June, the Ukrainian representatives toughened up their rhetoric, refusing to implement the Minsk agreements in the form in which they were endorsed by the United Nations Security Council. They are also disregarding the need for direct dialogue with the representatives of the authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk, in particular on political issues.

For example, the Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine, Andriy Yermak, said yesterday in an interview with the Levy Bereg media outlet that the country's leadership had prepared some kind of new draft law on the special status of Donbas, which the Ukrainian Government intends to discuss only with the

amenable representatives of the region, who have recently appeared in the Ukrainian delegation at the TCG. Just think about this – Ukraine intends to discuss the political aspects of the settlement within its own delegation and then present this as a position that has been agreed upon with Donbas. And what about the authorized representatives of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions who were officially recognized as such by the Ukrainian Government in the minutes of the TCG meeting on 11 March 2020? What is this if not a reinterpretation of the agreements?

Under these circumstances, the statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Dmytro Kuleba, to the effect that the Minsk agreements “are not dead yet” but are hooked up to a “ventilator” provided by French and German colleagues was telling. Once again, we ask our “Normandy format” partners: do the authorities in Paris and Berlin really accept and support the ideas voiced by the Ukrainian Government of abandoning direct dialogue with the representatives of Donbas and rewriting (or updating) the Minsk Package of Measures? Further silence on the part of our colleagues in this regard will be an indication in favour of such an assumption.

Unfortunately, we do not see a proper response either from the senior officials of the OSCE to the Ukrainian Government’s attempts to emasculate the Minsk agreements. The settlement process has come to a standstill on all tracks. Ukraine’s inability and unwillingness to reach any practical agreements with the representatives of the authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk in the TCG have complicated the humanitarian situation at the line of contact over the past few days. For example, having taken a unilateral decision to reopen the Marinka and Stanytsia Luhanska checkpoints on 10 June, the Ukrainian authorities failed to secure an agreement on the simultaneous opening of the corresponding militia checkpoints on the other side of the line of contact with due regard for all the necessary hygiene and epidemiological measures. As a result, at the height of the epidemic, scores of people and vehicles waited for hours in vain at the entrance to the checkpoints. Some people were forced to spend the night right next to the checkpoints, as the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) reported.

The representatives of the Ukrainian Government also refused to engage in a meaningful discussion with the representatives of the authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk on the operating procedure at the checkpoints at the meeting of the TCG on 15 June, which means they effectively rejected the proposals to co-ordinate the opening of “humanitarian corridors” for particularly vulnerable citizens. No progress has been made to date on the simultaneous opening of new checkpoints in Shchastia and Zolote. Ukraine stubbornly refuses to provide security guarantees for synchronized preparations, including mine clearance, on either side of the line of contact.

Against this background, the SMM continues to report dozens of Ukrainian armoured vehicles, tanks and weapons at railway stations near the line of contact in the Donetsk region. The Ukrainian armed forces continue to deploy them in residential areas. Recent examples were given in the report dated 15 June, including an anti-aircraft gun near residential houses in Avdiivka.

The situation in and around the disengagement areas remains worrying. Almost immediately after the destruction of an SMM camera system in Petrivske on 2 June, the Mission spotted about ten units of equipment and weaponry belonging to the Ukrainian armed forces in the nearby village of Bohdanivka (report dated 6 June). Some of them were under camouflage among residential houses. Instances of ammunition being transported, unloaded and put into storage there were also recorded (report dated 9 June). This begs the question: who benefits from reduced monitoring in and around the disengagement area in Petrivske? We urge the Mission to continue to actively monitor the situation both in the disengagement area itself and on its periphery. The plans for agreeing on new disengagement areas at the TCG have stalled, which is not conducive to reducing military tensions on the line of contact.

In these circumstances, the United States of America, Canada, the United Kingdom and a number of European Union countries continue to train and supply arms to the Ukrainian army and effectively incite it to engage in further violence against the people of Donbas. A few days ago, the Canadian Defence Ministry announced its plans to send a further 90 military instructors to Ukraine. They should already arrive in the Lviv region in June and start training Ukrainian military personnel. According to the US embassy in Ukraine, on 16 June, the US authorities transferred the latest military shipment, including walkie-talkies, ammunition and warheads for missile systems worth 60 million US dollars, to the Ukrainian armed forces. During the previous delivery of US military cargo in May of this year, it was openly stated that it would be sent to eastern Ukraine for military operations.

All this is not conducive to reducing military tensions and serves to support the “war party” in Kyiv with its belligerent aspirations regarding Donbas. NATO mechanisms are engaged for the same purposes. The other day, the Alliance announced its intention to get Ukraine involved in a partnership programme with enhanced opportunities. As noted, this step is aimed at increasing the forces’ military compatibility. In fact, however, it sends an unconstructive message to Ukraine’s politico-military leadership, which continues its military operation against civilians. It looks like a way to encourage the Ukrainian Government to shell Donbas. Need we recall that 12 years ago, after NATO’s public promises to intensify its ties with Georgia, the leaders of that country led by the now Ukrainian citizen, Mikheil Saakashvili, unleashed a bloody military venture in South Ossetia? The question now is whether the current decision by the Alliance will trigger fresh waves of violence in Donbas. And it goes without saying that measures designed to attract new countries into NATO’s orbit are not helping to strengthen security in Europe any more than the attempts to artificially reshape their historical and cultural references. We note once again that the continuing crisis in Ukraine is the result of the February 2014 coup d’état, which was inspired, funded and organized from abroad and has led to the armed confrontation in Donbas and the massive suffering of millions of civilians in Ukraine.

One further point: 17 June marks the sad sixth anniversary of the death of the Russian reporters Igor Kornelyuk and Anton Voloshin in Donbas. They were filming a piece about refugees being removed from the war zone close to the town of Shchastia near Stanytsia Luhanska and came under mortar and artillery fire from the Ukrainian armed forces. The Ukrainian law enforcement and justice authorities have so far failed to establish all the circumstances of their murder, as is the case with many other journalists killed in Ukraine.

For a long time in the past and still today, we have been witnessing the Ukrainian authorities’ attempts to shift responsibility for resolving the conflict in eastern Ukraine on to others. The progress in implementing the Minsk agreements, which seemed quite real after the “Normandy format” summit in Paris on 9 December 2019, has been cancelled out by the actions of the Ukrainian Government’s new negotiators in the TCG.

Moreover, in an effort to blame all the failures on Russia and to distract attention from their own inaction in implementing the Minsk agreements, the Ukrainian Government does not shrink from base provocations like the one organized on 12 June involving the Russian embassy building in Kyiv. This once again demonstrates Ukraine’s unwillingness to fulfil its international obligations to ensure the normal functioning of diplomatic institutions, as required by the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.

We call on our international partners, the OSCE and Ukraine’s external mentors to exert maximum influence on the authorities in Kyiv and to encourage them to implement the provisions of the Package of Measures in a full and co-ordinated manner on the basis of direct and sustainable dialogue between the authorities in Kyiv, Donetsk and Luhansk.

Thank you for your attention.