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**STATEMENT BY MR. VLADIMIR ZHEGLOV,
DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1290th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL
VIA VIDEO TELECONFERENCE**

19 November 2020

In response to the report by the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine

Mr. Chairperson,

We welcome the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine, Mr. Henrik Villadsen. The scale of the problems that persist in that country as far as the implementation of OSCE commitments is concerned, along with the Ukrainian Government's unabated violent operation against the population of Donbas, means that it is essential for the OSCE to maintain high vigilance towards the state of affairs in Ukraine. The human rights situation – including such aspects as the rights of national minorities and ensuring freedom of the media and the rule of law – is especially troubling. We expect the Co-ordinator to carry out a balanced programme of work, paying particular attention to the most pressing issues and without placing too much emphasis on matters of a more general nature, such as the promotion of gender equality.

In the local elections that took place in Ukraine on 25 October the residents of 18 areas, controlled by the Ukrainian armed forces, that are adjacent to the line of contact in Donbas were deprived of their political and civil rights by not being able to take part in the elections for “security reasons”. This justification seems odd, to put it mildly, in view of the significant improvement in the security situation that has taken place since the summer following the entry into effect on 27 July 2020 of the measures to strengthen the ceasefire regime. In your report, Mr. Villadsen, you point out that the Co-ordinator's Office facilitated dialogue between the authorities and the public on the postponement of the dates for the elections. So what was the outcome of that dialogue, then? Which recommendations were proposed in the end? We urge you to intensify your work with the Ukrainian State bodies in order to prevent the introduction of amending laws that entail massive encroachment on the rights of the inhabitants of entire regions.

In the Co-ordinator's report it is said that considerable attention is being paid to the functioning of the judiciary, including the work of the Constitutional Court. The constitutional crisis that erupted in Ukraine in early November puts a question mark over the effectiveness of the work being done. The confrontation between the executive and judicial branches of power, where attempts are being made to draw the members of parliament into the conflict, has effectively paralysed the administration of constitutional justice in Ukraine. This raises doubts as to the validity of assertions about the alleged maturity of the Ukrainian democratic system and the adequacy of the international support being provided to the latter.

Violations of the linguistic and cultural rights of non-Ukrainian-speaking citizens continue to occur in Ukraine. On 1 September, the discriminatory laws on education and on full general secondary education, which were adopted at the prompting of the country's previous authorities when they were still in power, started to be implemented. Many children have thus been deprived of the right to receive secondary education at State schools in the Russian language and the languages of national minorities. Moreover, a dedicated law to protect the linguistic rights of national minorities has still not been drafted. Nor is anything known about specific plans by the Ukrainian authorities to prepare such legislation.

Something that continues to be cause for great alarm is the implementation of the law on supporting the functioning of the Ukrainian language as the State language, a number of provisions of which are of a blatantly discriminatory nature. The promise that President Volodymyr Zelenskyy – immediately after being elected – made to undertake a “thorough analysis” of the law to ensure that it was compatible with all the constitutional rights and interests of all citizens of Ukraine, has ultimately not led to any practical measures to remedy the situation. What is more, on 16 January 2021 additional provisions of the law will enter into force that further narrow the spheres in which the Russian language and the languages of national minorities may be used – for example, in the services sector, place names and cartography, technical and reporting documentation, and so on.

We call on the Co-ordinator to keep a close watch on the aforementioned issues. We trust that you, Mr. Villadsen, will fill the gap in the OSCE's attention to these matters that has been created by the temporary hiatus in the institutional functioning of the High Commissioner on National Minorities.

The media in Ukraine continue to be subjected to great pressure by the authorities. The battle against alternative opinions is being consistently extended to the regulatory sphere. The Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian Parliament) has been asked to consider a draft law on the media that provides for fines and even prison sentences being handed down to those members of the press whose views are not in line with the political assessments advanced by the country's leadership. Such dissent is equated with so-called “anti-Ukrainian propaganda”. At the start of the year, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media made his thoughts known on that draft law: he described such restrictions on freedom of speech as “excessive and disproportionate”. He called for the draft law to be brought in line with international standards.

The Ukrainian Parliament is at the same time considering a draft law amending the law on television and radio broadcasting – a draft law that provides for exactly the same prohibitions to be applied to broadcasters, whose licences may even be revoked. On 16 November, the Verkhovna Rada's Committee on Humanitarian and Information Policy completed its consideration of the document.

The problem of systemic impunity for crimes against journalists in Ukraine has not been resolved either. This year alone, more than 60 instances of attacks against reporters have been officially recorded so far. Many high-profile crimes against media workers committed since the bloody events on the Maidan still remain unsolved. We call upon the Co-ordinator to carry out systemic work with the Ukrainian authorities to put right any violations of freedom of speech and of the press. In the absence of an OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, you, Mr. Villadsen, have a particular responsibility for this area.

We note that in July of this year the Co-ordinator signed a new memorandum of co-operation with the Verkhovna Rada's Commissioner for Human Rights, Lyudmyla Denisova. We urge the Co-ordinator to work together intensively with the latter in order to ensure that Ukraine fulfils its OSCE commitments.

In closing, we should like to wish you, esteemed Mr. Villadsen, every success in your further work. We trust that this work will be carried out on the basis of openness and accountability in accordance with the principles agreed on by all 57 OSCE participating States.

Thank you for your attention.