

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1115th 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,

We are pleased to have this opportunity to recall once again the need to implement the Minsk Package of Measures, which Ukraine is still avoiding. We understand that not everyone in Kyiv is willing or happy about this. The hysterical statements by the Minister of Internal Affairs, Mr. Arsen Avakov, via his social media pages in response to the perfectly normal and entirely logical call for him to implement his part of the Minsk agreements are further evidence of this. We have also heard other comments by high-ranking Ukrainian politicians, who demonstrate their unwillingness to implement their commitments by thinking up conditions that are not present in the Package of Measures for the holding of elections in Donbas, and calling into question the need to grant Donbas special status.

We can see some progress towards a peaceful settlement of the crisis – forces and hardware have been disengaged in two of the three disengagement areas. However, even these timid steps towards the disengagement of forces are causing great difficulty for the Ukrainian Government. The Ukrainian soldiers continue to drag out the implementation of the agreement on the disengagement of forces in Stanytsia Luhanska.

The parties should carry out demining in Zolote and Petrivske, which among other things will enable the monitors from the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) to work properly in the demilitarized areas. In 2015 the SMM was forced to leave its post in Shyrokyne under fire from the Ukrainian security forces that subsequently occupied the village. Initially Shyrokyne was meant to have become a pilot area for demilitarization. Now it is one of the hotspots and is occupied by the Ukrainian security forces. A repeat of this kind of incident cannot unfortunately be ruled out.

The agreement on the disengagement of forces has its opponents. In the Verkhovna Rada, offshoots of the nationalist punitive battalions have even blocked the podium, protesting against the Framework Decision on the Disengagement of Forces and demanding that combat operations be continued, while their accomplices held demonstrations at the line

of contact under Azov flags (this was mentioned in the SMM report dated 10 October). The Ukrainian radicals have no need for peace in Ukraine, and the authorities in Kyiv are indulging them. Ukrainian nationalism within the country and those who support it from outside are the main obstacle to pacifying the situation.

The Ukrainian Government “compensates” for even modest progress in the disengagement of forces in Zolote and Petrivske with escalation in other areas and the resumed shelling of towns and villages on a massive scale. For almost a month there were no civilian casualties, and now the Ukrainian Government has returned to its old ways. On 9 October, the SMM recorded 19 craters caused by 120 mm mortar shells in Sakhanka and the destruction of 10 houses. Two women aged 56 and 67 years were seriously wounded. The SMM report from 12 October refers to renewed shelling of that village using 122 mm artillery guns, as a result of which one local resident was killed and a further three civilians wounded. The monitors also confirmed damage to houses as a result of shelling last week in Oleksandrivka, Novooleksandrivka, Stakhanov and Makiivka.

Ukrainian heavy equipment continues to be moved towards the line of contact. During the week, in violation of the Package of Measures, the OSCE monitors recorded 47 pieces of Ukrainian large-calibre artillery, including 7 multiple-launch rocket systems (MLRS) in Soledar, 8 MLRS in Sievierodonetsk, 4 MLRS in Artemivsk, 19 howitzers in Zelene Pole, 6 anti-tank guns in Zhelanne, 1 howitzer in Shchastia, 1 self-propelled howitzer in Smolianyove and 1 anti-tank system in Stanytsia Luhanska. Between 3 and 11 October, the SMM counted 183 units of Ukrainian military equipment just beyond the boundaries of the withdrawal line, including the unloading of 14 howitzers, 6 anti-tank guns, 20 tanks and 25 armoured personnel carriers at railway platforms in Rubizhne on 11 October. In addition, 58 Ukrainian armoured personnel carriers were recorded in the security zone. More than 230 units of military equipment were reported missing following checks at Ukrainian armed forces’ depots between 3 and 11 October.

The peace process must become irreversible through the implementation of the political aspects of the Minsk agreements. The resolution of security issues needs to be synchronized with political steps. The instability at the line of contact, which the Ukrainian Government is itself supporting, must not be used as a pretext for further sabotaging the political process.

We would remind you of the need to reach agreement on the modalities for local elections in Donbas and to formalize them in Ukrainian legislation. A law is required on permanent special status. Amnesty, immunity from prosecution in connection with the events in the south-east and, lastly, constitutional reform must be secured. All of these issues form a single package of legal guarantees for safeguarding the rights of the people of Donbas. Only once these issues are resolved will it be possible to restore control of the border to the central authorities.

As it is, the monitoring of the border by the SMM has been intensified recently. Between 21 July and 27 September, the monitors travelled to the border 145 times, in other words more than twice a day. They encountered problems in visiting this sensitive facility in only 9 per cent of the cases. Last week, between 3 and 11 October, the SMM travelled on ten occasions to the Marynivka, Uspenka and Chervonopartyzansk checkpoints, the crossing point at Ulianiivske, and the Sieveryni, Krasnodarskyi-1 and Krasnodarskyi-2 border crossing points. They reported the usual cross-border flow of people and vehicles.

We are fully in agreement with our colleagues that everything necessary should be done to alleviate the situation of the civilian population in Donbas as winter approaches. We are grateful to all those who send humanitarian aid to the region and help in providing the population with water, electricity, food and emergency supplies. Increasing the number of crossing points at the line of contact is a good start. However, this will not eliminate the primary cause of suffering among the local population – to do that it is necessary to put a stop to the punitive so-called “anti-terrorist operation”, lift the humanitarian blockade of the region and restore the rights of Donbas residents to social security.

Attempts at the collective punishment of the population of the entire region do not increase sympathy towards the Ukrainian Government or its idea of a single State with territorial integrity. It is taking great effort on our part to convince the representatives of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions that it is still possible for them to exist normally within a single State together with Kyiv.

Distinguished colleagues,

The time has now come for our joint determined efforts to play a decisive role in transforming the situation in Ukraine from one of degradation to one of stabilization. We are actively working on this in various formats – in the Trilateral Contact Group, in the Normandy format and with other countries that have significant influence over the Ukrainian Government. The longer an indulgent attitude persists towards the unwillingness or inability of the authorities in Kyiv to implement the Minsk agreements, the longer and more difficult the peace process will be – as a result of which the inhabitants of Donbas and the population of the rest of Ukraine will suffer.

It is time to take a sober look at the situation. There is no alternative to the Package of Measures and there is no plan B. The Minsk agreements do not signify defeat or capitulation on the part of Ukraine, as the nationalists try to claim, but its salvation and an opportunity to ensure national reconciliation and harmony among all sections of Ukrainian society and between all the regions of Ukraine. However, as long as the Ukrainian Government tries to create a smokescreen for all the countless internal problems through so-called “Russian aggression”, it will be difficult to move forward.

Thank you for your attention.