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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1138th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

23 March 2017

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

Mr. Chairperson,

The atmosphere in Ukraine continues to deteriorate; the authorities are increasingly losing control of the situation and making concessions to the radicals. The Ukrainian armed forces are bombarding towns and villages in Donbas. Banks with Russian capital, which make up around 15 per cent of Ukraine's entire banking system, have been attacked. Draft laws that infringe on freedom of speech and the rights of the Russian-speaking population and national minorities are being prepared in the Verkhovna Rada. The Donbas trade embargo begun by "activists" has been sanctioned by the Government.

The situation at the line of contact is threatening to turn into a resumption of large-scale armed clashes. On 20 March, the Ukrainian armed forces provoked the latest escalation of tension near Kominternove. The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) confirms that large-scale armed clashes near Lebedynske began with rounds (from multiple-launch rocket systems) fired on militia-controlled territory in a north-easterly and north-north-easterly direction, in other words, from Ukrainian armed forces' positions.

The indiscriminate shelling of Donbas continues. During the week of 13 to 20 March, according to the SMM alone, 11 settlements were hit. Four workers were injured in the Kuibyshevskiyi district of Donetsk, along with a woman in Lozove, two construction workers in Zaitseve and a guard in Yasynuvata. A shelter established by the International Committee of the Red Cross in Stanytsia Luhanska was damaged, houses in Horlivka, Dokuchaievsk, Zolote-5 and Irmino were damaged or destroyed, and Kalynove and Kruta Hora were hit by artillery strikes. The SMM confirms the use by Ukrainian security forces of multiple-launch rocket systems (in Hnutove on 17 March and Lebedynske on 20 March).

The Ukrainian armed forces' actions also pose a threat of chemical contamination to the surrounding area. SMM monitors once again came under fire at the Donetsk filtration plant on 17 March in the presence of Russian officers from the Joint Centre for Control and Co-ordination (JCCC) and militia, who were attempting to carry out the latest repair work.

The Ukrainian Government is hindering the disengagement of forces. The SMM reported the appearance of armed security forces inside the Zolote area (13 March) and the laying of new mines in Zolote and Katerynivka.

Ukraine is impeding the work of the Russian JCCC officers.

The atmosphere in Donbas and the prospects for the implementation of the Minsk agreements are directly dependent on the internal political situation in Ukraine. The short-term goals of political infighting may result in an upsurge of violence at the line of contact. The more and the louder the world talks not about the real victims and destruction in Donbas but about so-called hybrid threats, the more difficult it will be to secure a de-escalation.

Tall tales about the Russian threat supported by provocations on the part of the Ukrainian armed forces at the line of contact remain the principal means of distracting the population and Western sponsors from Ukraine's real problems.

The SMM periodically informs us about demonstrations under socio-economic slogans. On 7 March, 1,800 people protested in Ivano-Frankivsk against rising public utility charges and Government policy. On 8 March, there was a rally in Kyiv under the motto "No to violence of all forms – from maternity hospitals to military enlistment offices"; an anti-fascist march was held in Kharkiv on the same day.

Conflicting statements by the country's leadership – some condemning the blockade in Donbas and others legitimizing it – are no longer surprising but cause for deep concern.

The Government, just as with the blockade in Donbas, is not only tolerating the radicals' attacks on banks with Russian capital, but also supporting them. According to the SMM, in the last few days alone, a cash machine was wrecked in Kharkiv, an office of a Russian bank in Dnipropetrovsk was daubed with paint and plastered with flyers, and offices of Sberbank and Alfa-Bank in Kyiv had sealing foam and paint poured over them, were pelted with stones and blocked up. In October 2016, the Ukrainian Government already prohibited the operation in Ukraine of a number of Russian payment systems, which were used, among other things, for transferring Ukrainian citizens' earnings home from Russia. It is clear that all of this is not simply vandalism, but a planned campaign under nationalistic slogans.

We have noted that, despite various signals from Western capitals, here at the OSCE, the representatives of the United States of America and Canada have not voiced their attitude to the Ukrainian Government's blockade policy.

The notorious symbol of the Maidan coup d'état, the burning tyre, has been joined by a concrete block, for this is what the radicals use to brick up branches of banks, sometimes even with the staff still inside. It should come as no surprise if in Ukraine any enterprises and establishments with Russian involvement are soon marked with a special sign (as is already the case, for example, with goods in Ukrainian shops). The analogies are, we believe, too obvious to ignore.

Another worrying aspect is the preliminary approval in the Verkhovna Rada on 16 March of the draft law on language quotas, which is intended to reduce broadcasting in Russian and the languages of national minorities on Ukrainian television to 25 per cent. This restricts the rights of the Russian-speaking population to receive information in their native language and to participate in public and political life. Such a step openly contravenes Article 10 of the Ukrainian Constitution, which guarantees the free use and protection of the Russian language. We recall that, in 2014, an attempt to amend the law on the principles of the language policy was one of the key factors that encouraged the inhabitants of south-eastern Ukraine to protest against the “Maidan” government.

The decision of the authorities in Kyiv to ban the Russian participant in the Eurovision Song Contest, Julia Samoilova, from entering the country is regrettable and even shameful. A good opportunity to show the world an example of humanity and a depoliticized attitude towards culture has been squandered.

However, humanity is not what the current Ukrainian authorities are all about. The Ukrainian Government’s style is turning off the water, gas and electricity supply, blocking the delivery of goods, banning television channels and programmes, films and books, performances by Russian artists, and putting “domestic separatists” in the Ukrainian Security Service’s basements and secret prisons.

Esteemed colleagues,

To support, let alone develop, Russophobia is extremely dangerous and it is difficult to keep the manifestations of aggressive nationalism within any limits.

It is time for the authorities in Kyiv to recognize that the only way of achieving peace in Ukraine is the systematic implementation of the politico-military and economic provisions of the Package of Measures. The SMM leadership’s proposals for ensuring a speedy withdrawal of heavy equipment and the disengagement of the parties’ forces are logical and clear. It is time to put an end to the futile attempts to regain Kominternove, Yasynuvata and Debaltseve, as well as the no less destructive attempts at a complete blockade to force Donbas to capitulate. The price of these adventures is human lives.

The Package of Measures does not signify the capitulation of Ukraine but a chance, perhaps the only one, to overcome the crisis and preserve the country’s unity and sovereignty. To do this, it is necessary to show the will, put an end to the deadlocked punitive operation and, in direct dialogue with the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk, agree on the practical aspects of a political settlement concerning local elections, permanent legislation on the special status, constitutional reform, an amnesty, and so on. Meanwhile, the Ukrainian Government is moving in the opposite direction so we should not be surprised at the consequences.

Thank you for your attention.