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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,  
AT THE 1089<sup>th</sup> MEETING OF THE  
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

11 February 2016

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

Mr. Chairperson,

A year ago, considerable success towards a peaceful settlement of the crisis in Ukraine was achieved in Minsk with the signing of the Package of Measures. The value of that document lies in the fact that it was agreed upon with the involvement of the Ukrainian parties to the conflict in Donbas themselves. Active hostilities ceased and for a period of time heavy artillery belonging to the Ukrainian army was successfully withdrawn from major towns in Donbas, considerably reducing the number of victims of the punitive operation. The specific parameters took shape for a political settlement that would make it possible to defend the rights and interests of the residents of Donbas. A sequence of actions was established for normalizing the situation and ensuring a return to peaceful life and reconciliation within society.

It must, however, be noted that further progress has been blocked. In fact, the Ukrainian Government is holding the implementation of the Package of Measures hostage, yet the Package remains the sole basis for a peace process, whatever feelings Ukrainian politicians have about the text. Continuing tension in the conflict zone gives the Ukrainian Government justification to put all the problems down to external factors, whether Russia itself, Soviet-era monuments or anything else.

The provocative shelling of towns in Donbas is intensifying. The residents of Donetsk, Horlivka and Kominternove find themselves under fire from mortars. There have been casualties. A large number of weapons and troops have already been amassed near the line of contact. Alarming reports continue to be received from various sources about large movements of military equipment to the rear of the Ukrainian army and transfers of fresh reserves and new equipment to the conflict zone.

The information provided by the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) on the appearance in the security zone of a large quantity of Ukrainian military equipment is an indication of the Ukrainian security forces' readiness to resume large-scale

hostilities. For example, between 4 and 9 February the monitors recorded 40 howitzers and 12 anti-tank guns near the line of contact. Live fire exercises are conducted in Trokhizbenka on a daily basis. A large quantity of weapons belonging to the Ukrainian armed forces has been amassed immediately behind the withdrawal line, where between 4 and 9 February the SMM recorded 15 Grad multiple-launch rocket systems, 17 howitzers, 18 Giatsint-B large-calibre guns and 4 anti-tank guns. Over the same period, the monitors were unable to account for 43 anti-tank guns, 10 mortars and 4 tanks at Ukrainian depots.

The SMM is compelled to respond to these signals and verify, confirm or refute the information, because monitoring the security situation is in fact its main function.

We cannot but draw attention to the fact that the reports of the SMM, which has a record budget and is requesting a further increase, should be more complete. You will agree that we are all entitled to expect this.

It is extremely distressing that a bus struck a Ukrainian landmine near the Novomykhailivka checkpoint. Attention has already been drawn repeatedly to the fact that the Ukrainian military and nationalist battalions neglect to put up signs marking minefields where this is necessary; on the contrary, mine hazard signs appear in those places where they would like to prevent the monitors from going.

The fact that Ukraine is exploiting incidents that occur near checkpoints to justify its policy of tightening the regime governing the crossing of the line of contact by the civilian population is cause for particular concern. We see no justification for this action. The blockade of Donbas needs to stop.

We are under no illusions that the presence of SMM monitors near the line of contact will help to ensure full compliance with the ceasefire regime. However, this could at least contribute to reducing the number and intensity of skirmishes. Monitoring should be stepped up primarily in places where the parties' units and weapons are deployed, where there is shelling on a daily basis and the risk of a resumption of hostilities is high.

If there is to be de-escalation, there needs to be SMM patrols on both sides of the line of contact, greater use of surveillance equipment, and the facilitation of direct dialogue between the parties on the ground in order to prevent incidents and provocations.

Overall, we note the need for closer working contacts between the SMM leadership and the representatives of certain areas of Donbas, including at the local level. We also recall that the Mission's mandate stipulates this directly.

Mr. Chairperson,

Despite the unfavourable situation and the blatant unwillingness of Ukraine to move forward, it is essential to step up negotiation efforts within the Trilateral Contact Group and its working groups. Support is also needed from the Normandy format. We hope that the forthcoming meeting will yield results.

No time should be lost or pretexts invented to delay the drawing up of agreements on the key aspects of a comprehensive political settlement, which remains the strategic priority of the Minsk process.

At this stage, reaching agreement on the modalities for local elections and enshrining them in Ukrainian law takes precedence. The parties have presented their proposals; now it is time to work on a mutually acceptable formula that would be in keeping with the Package of Measures.

We recall that the Ukrainian Government needs to consolidate the special status of Donbas in law in order to carry out constitutional reform as part of the implementation of the Minsk agreements. The corresponding changes to the law of Ukraine on the special procedure for local self-governance in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions are to be agreed upon with the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk.

A solution needs to be found to the question regarding the prohibition of prosecution and punishment of persons in connection with the events that took place in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine.

We trust that it will prove possible in the Trilateral Contact Group to reach specific – albeit not so ambitious – decisions on demining, the exchange of illegally detained persons and the restoration of destroyed infrastructure, in particular the water supply.

In conclusion, I feel compelled once again to draw attention to one of the most serious factors hindering the implementation of the Minsk agreements, namely the persisting and powerful influence of far-right nationalist elements on the power structures in Ukraine.

This influence extends not only to parliament but also to law enforcement and judicial authorities. We see this, for example, in the investigations into the “sniper incident”, the tragedies in Odessa and Mariupol, the series of mysterious suicides of opposition politicians in late 2014 and early 2015, and the murder of the journalist Oles Buzina in April 2015.

It would be useful for the SMM and the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media to keep track of this case – how Verkhovna Rada deputies have been lobbying for the release from custody of the perpetrators of a crime who were detained while the trail was still hot, why the investigator was removed from this case and other aspects which seem strange.

Apologetics for Ukrainian nationalism and indulgence towards so-called “patriots” will not make it any easier to progress towards a solution to the situation in Ukraine, nor towards restoring national harmony to the country.

For our part, we stand ready to make further joint efforts to help find a political solution to the Ukrainian crisis.

Thank you for your attention.