

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ANDREY RUDENKO,
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RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1038th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

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

Mr. Chairperson,

We are extremely concerned at the development of the situation in Donbas, and call on all the parties to the conflict to put an immediate stop to the hostilities and any violence. There must be an immediate end to the barbaric annihilation of the civilian population in Donbas.

Needless to say, we join the Chairperson-in-Office and the Chief Monitor of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) in calling for a local temporary truce for humanitarian reasons with a view to giving civilians an opportunity to leave the conflict zone. We are in agreement that the SMM could assist in this matter.

We firmly believe that an immediate ceasefire is now required not only in Debaltseve but everywhere along the entire line of separation between the conflicting parties. The approach taken to the extremely serious threat to the civilian population cannot be selective. The list of cities, towns and villages that have been subjected to shelling – Donetsk, Luhansk, Horlivka, Dokuchaievsk, Komsomolske – just grows longer every day.

The situation demands urgent, decisive and balanced action.

This applies to all the formats working to find ways to stabilize the situation, including the Normandy format. The Contact Group, which should continue its work to maintain a direct dialogue between Kyiv and Donetsk and Luhansk and to assist the parties in elaborating mutually acceptable solutions, plays a key role.

Despite serious disagreements between the parties, it is essential to agree as soon as possible on a ceasefire, the withdrawal of weapons, the release of detainees and other urgent issues. The main thing is to ensure that there are no further civilian casualties or destruction of vital infrastructure in towns.

The parties should refrain from stridently accusing one another of disrupting the negotiations. It is perfectly clear that the escalation of the conflict is the handiwork of the proponents of a solution by force, for whom it is absolutely essential to maintain a hotbed of constant instability on the Russian border. This road leads nowhere. We need to stop ratcheting up the belligerent rhetoric and reinforcing the image of an external enemy who is blamed for all the failures of domestic policy. The parties need to sit down together and reach an agreement.

During the past week, the situation in the conflict zone has only grown worse. The indiscriminate shelling of towns has intensified dramatically. The number of casualties among the civilian population is growing. In January Ukrainian security forces killed 242 civilians, 273 were injured and 434 buildings were destroyed. Yesterday, a Donetsk city hospital in the Tekstilshik neighbourhood came under fire, as many as 15 people may have been killed and many injured. Not only was the hospital hit but also an apartment block. According to the available information, the shelling came from Uragan multiple-launch rocket systems near the town of Marinka.

Cluster and incendiary munitions continue to be used. Not only local inhabitants, to whom Kyiv remains deaf, and international human rights organizations but also SMM monitors are reporting the use of cluster munitions by the Ukrainian security forces against densely populated areas. According to the Mission's reports, Luhansk was hit by cluster munitions on 27 January from a large-calibre Smerch multiple-launch rocket system and the village of Komsomolske on 2 February from an Uragan system.

Our Western colleagues prefer not to comment on these facts. They demand condemnation of the insurgents, but when it comes to the shelling by Ukrainian security forces of civilians in major towns they prefer to talk in vague terms, not always admitting even the most obvious fact of the flagrant violation of the norms of international humanitarian law, without even specifying who is behind this.

More and more people in Ukraine are beginning to realize fully what their war-obsessed leaders are pushing them into and refuse to be accomplices to crimes against their own people, especially when they are forced to fight in the "retreat-blocking detachments" of the punitive battalions. Despite the steps taken to restrict freedom of movement within Ukraine and limit travel outside the country, many potential conscripts are attempting to hide abroad. Some are fleeing to Russia. This is in addition to the already more than 600,000 refugees who have applied for official refugee status. During the past week, the number of men of conscription age who fled to Russia from Ukraine increased by 20,000.

We have still not received official notification from Ukraine on the transition to reciprocal travel arrangements for citizens on foreign passports. The decision to abandon the convenient and liberal travel arrangements for Russian citizens to Ukraine is deeply regrettable since this will considerably complicate relations between relatives and for that matter contacts between millions of citizens of the two countries and border relations. I might mention that according to official figures alone there are some 2.5 million Ukrainian citizens living in Russia. We, on the other hand, believe it important to maintain the current border-crossing procedures for humanitarian reasons.

Ukrainians of conscription age are also fleeing to other neighbouring countries. Although, according to the media, European Union countries are extremely unwilling to accept the refugees from Ukraine who made the “European choice”.

The financial and economic blockade of Donbas is intensifying. The population does not have access to pensions and social benefits; the delivery of food and medicines is being hindered. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs notes that Kyiv’s decision to introduce a complicated and clearly ineffective permit system is preventing civilians from leaving dangerous regions. Similar assessments are also contained in the SMM’s reports. We might recall that the Ukrainian authorities relished the prospect of “food riots” in Donbas. We have also heard about this here at Permanent Council meetings. All these actions are in effect aimed at reducing the situation of the population of these regions to a disastrous one.

Such a policy only results in further alienating the affected regions from Kyiv. We fail to understand what the central authorities want to achieve with this specific policy. It is, however, clear that such a policy is unlikely to increase Kyiv’s popularity with the Donbas population and is unlikely to help defend the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

It is clear that sending humanitarian aid from Russia to the affected regions is not in line with the Donbas blockade policy. The delivery of humanitarian cargo will make it possible to provide Donbas’s civilian population with vital food, medicines and other essential goods and to conduct reconstruction work on critical infrastructure facilities, somehow helping to stabilize the socio-economic and epidemiological situation in the affected regions.

Since August 2014, 12 Russian humanitarian convoys have delivered around 16,000 tonnes of humanitarian aid. This included more than 10,000 tonnes of food, water-purification systems, medical equipment and medicines and other humanitarian aid. All of the goods delivered were handed over to the authorities of the affected regions.

OSCE monitors were present at the unloading of the humanitarian convoy and could see for themselves that there were no military goods in the cargo.

Mr. Chairperson,

The United States of America has at last admitted it was directly involved in the unconstitutional *coup d’état* in Kyiv from the very beginning. President Obama stated directly that the United States “brokered a deal to transition power”. This is no longer a secret, as a representative of the United States Department of State put it. We await new revelations, but the main thing that we expect from Washington is a clear call on Kyiv to stop shelling towns, to refrain from a military scenario and to move towards the way of dialogue in the interests of a peaceful political settlement.

We cannot but draw attention to the worrying developments in Ukraine beyond the conflict zone – tougher media legislation and the harassment of journalists. There are proposals for a rigorous decision to disband an entire parliamentary faction – the Opposition Bloc – and ban the party simply because it dared not to support the odious draft law recognizing Russia as the aggressor.

On 23 January, the Security Service of Ukraine announced that it had deported 88 Russian journalists. The Ukrainian authorities prohibit the broadcasting of Russian television programmes and films, even those purely for entertainment purposes. The local office of the public prosecutor has instituted criminal proceedings against the Luhansk branch of the Ukrainian Radio Broadcasting, Radio Communication and Television Concern for broadcasting Russian television channels. The accused face a prison sentence of between 8 and 15 years.

The witch-hunt continues: the information centre of the Russian A.M. Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Foundation in Kyiv is to be closed. The Foundation openly carried out purely routine activities, which included explaining Russian approaches to current foreign policy problems to local audiences, students and the general public.

There are undoubtedly forces in Ukraine that have an interest in restoring peace and stability in the country and carrying out the necessary reforms for national reconciliation and the maintenance of a single political, economic and humanitarian space in the country. We have drawn attention to the statement by President Poroshenko regarding his intention to establish in the near future a constitutional commission on amending the Basic Law with regard to decentralization. As we understand, assistance from the Council of Europe Venice Commission has also been requested.

It is precisely these forces that need our support and not those who fan the flames of war, are again burning tyres in central Kyiv and are poised for the usual provocations in the run-up to major international high-level meetings like the Munich Security Conference.

Thank you for your attention.