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PC.DEL/104/21
28 January 2021

ENGLISH
Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1300th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL
VIA VIDEO TELECONFERENCE**

28 January 2021

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

Madam Chairperson,

The past week has not brought any noticeable progress in the settlement of the crisis in Ukraine. Instead of responsibly following the blueprint of the Minsk Package of Measures and attending to the legislative and practical implementation of the steps stipulated in that document, the Ukrainian Government continues to call for its “clarification” and “modernization” (see Oleksiy Reznikov’s interview of 20 January with the Ukrainian online media outlet *Levy Bereg*). In parallel, attempts are being made to construct some kind of legal alternative. The so-called State policy framework for the “transitional period” and the economic development strategy for the Donetsk and Luhansk regions currently being drawn up are invoked as elements of this alternative. At the same time, the current outline of these initiatives provides neither for the full implementation of the political provisions of the Minsk agreements nor for the lifting of the socio-economic blockade of Donbas in the near term.

It is not surprising that against this backdrop the military situation in the region remains difficult. We are concerned by reports of an explosion on 15 January causing damage to a gas pipeline in the settlement of Hlafirivka in a militia-controlled area of the Luhansk region, which left the residents of several settlements without gas supply, and also by information about attacks on positions from the air. Violations of the ceasefire regime prompted the convening of an extraordinary videoconference of the Security Working Group of the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) on 25 January. However, the discussion did not lead to any noticeable improvement in the situation. Full stabilization is being hampered by difficulties in applying the co-ordination mechanism for responding to ceasefire violations.

We recall that the creation and involvement of the aforementioned mechanism through the facilitation of the Joint Centre for Control and Co-ordination (JCCC) in its current form is stipulated in measure no. 5 of the measures to strengthen the ceasefire regime, which came into force on 27 July 2020. However, Ukraine’s representatives in the JCCC continue to balk at the proposals by the Donetsk and Luhansk representatives for improving that mechanism. As you know, the Donbas representatives recently put forward the idea of organizing a videoconference with the participation of the representatives of the Ukrainian Government and the authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk in the JCCC, to which Ukraine has yet to respond.

There has been no breakthrough either in the humanitarian field. We have taken note of the willingness voiced last week by the militia to unilaterally arrange, in a spirit of goodwill, for a number of people being held in detention facilities to be handed over to the Ukrainian authorities. On 20 January, while visiting the Luhansk region, the Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian Parliament) Commissioner for Human Rights, Liudmyla Denysova, confirmed information on the Ukrainian side's preparations for such a transfer. As it appears from official statements, the operation has not yet taken place owing to organizational and logistical difficulties on Ukraine's part. We trust that the Ukrainian Government and the authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk will be able to reach agreements on this swiftly.

As for the exchanges of detained persons from among those who were involved in events in the region, the position taken by the Ukrainian Government's negotiators is making it considerably more difficult to reach new agreements. I am referring, in particular, to the unfulfilled commitment to put a stop to the criminal prosecution of those already handed over to the Donbas authorities – a commitment that the head of the Ukrainian delegation to the TCG confirmed in writing twice, namely in December 2019 and April 2020.

Attacks on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church have not stopped this year. Several incidents occurred in January. On 12 and 16 January, two clerics of the Zaporizhzhia eparchy – Archpriest Vladimir Gumenyuk and Deacon Georgy Cherpakov – were attacked with knives in Zaporizhzhia. In the first case, the priest was wounded in the temporal region of the head and required surgery. On 18 and 21 January, the Church of the Nativity of John the Baptist and St. Vladimir's Cathedral in Kharkiv were vandalized. The doors were forced open and religious relics and alms stolen.

Bishop Victor of Baryshev, head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church's representation to European and international organizations, commented on the incidents in the media. He said that the security problems which had arisen were linked, among other things, to the brazen interference of the Ukrainian authorities in Church affairs and their attempts "to favour some and discredit others".

Unfortunately, information on these events has so far not been reflected in the reports of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM). We count on the Mission to quickly establish all the facts. We urge it to monitor closely what is happening in Ukraine in accordance with its mandate and to include the relevant information in its reports without delay.

We must also note that in practice the Ukrainian leadership appears incapable of resisting the nationalist forces whose destructive actions are aimed at fostering an atmosphere of chauvinism and inter-ethnic hatred. Thus, despite assurances at the OSCE that the country's authorities are combating manifestations of aggressive nationalism, far-right radicals continue to intimidate civil activists with impunity. For example, on 22 January, Right Sector members attacked journalist Ruslan Kotsaba and his mother, along with his lawyer Tetyana Montyan, near the court building in Kolomyia (Ivano-Frankivsk region). They assaulted him with a fire extinguisher and damaged his car while chanting ultra-nationalist slogans. The law enforcement officials present at the scene were unable to prevent the attack. None of the assailants were detained by the police. This information has also not been reflected in the SMM's reports to date.

Madam Chairperson,

We draw attention to the statement adopted on 20 January by both chambers of the Russian Parliament – the Federation Council and the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation – in connection with the continuing infringements of the rights of ethnic Russian and Russian-speaking

citizens of Ukraine. It points out that the Ukrainian authorities have not stopped the blatant and egregious violations of the rights, including linguistic rights, of members of the various ethnic groups living in Ukraine. Since 2014, the country has been undergoing forced Ukrainization with the aim of creating a mono-ethnic State, which is in fact destroying the integrity of the State itself from within.

The Russian senators and deputies stress that one of the consequences of the February 2014 coup d'état in Ukraine has been the country's critical dependence on external forces, namely the United States of America and the European Union. As a result, these forces bear their share of political responsibility for the Ukrainian Government's ongoing violations of its obligations under international law to respect the rights of millions of citizens, including the rights of national minorities.

Once again, we call on the OSCE and Ukraine's external "minders" to bring their influence to bear as much as possible on the Ukrainian authorities so as to induce them to fulfil their commitments in good faith.

Thank you for your attention.