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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1170th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

21 December 2017

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

Mr. Chairperson,

Unfortunately, we are again seeing a sharp rise in tension in the situation in Donbas. There has been a substantial increase in the number of ceasefire violations, including violations involving the use of weapons prohibited under the Minsk agreements, including multiple-launch rocket systems. On 19 December in Yasynuvata the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) recorded more than 4,000 instances of shelling and shooting. Shelling of Yasynuvata resumed on 20 December, according to press reports. Two civilians were killed and two were injured.

On 13 December, the Ukrainian armed forces endangered the lives of SMM monitors when they fired from heavy artillery in close proximity to the SMM office in Popasna. The monitors subsequently recorded the consequences of this shelling in Pervomaisk and Stakhanov, where at least five houses and electricity power lines were destroyed and damaged. This situation repeated itself on 18 December.

The SMM reported that from 11 to 19 December shelling from positions where security forces are deployed left six civilians injured. Widespread damage and destruction was recorded in Stakhanov, Pervomaisk, Dokuchaievsk and Horlivka. Kalynove-Borshchuvate, Luhansk and Sakhanka were hit by artillery strikes. New craters from shells launched against Donetsk People's Republic-controlled territory were discovered around the Donetsk filtration station.

Over these last days there were 6,500 instances of shooting directed against Donetsk and 1,500 instances against Luhansk. Such mass-scale destruction in Donbas has not been seen in a long time. We hope that the SMM will make a timely and thorough check of this information.

Heavy artillery was used to fire on these towns and sites. As we understand the situation, the SMM is hindered in its efforts to detect these weapons by real and fictitious

mine threats in territory controlled by the Ukrainian armed forces. The SMM encountered 24 such threats in this week alone (11 to 19 December). This is more than twice the number of all restrictions that the SMM encountered on militia-controlled territory over the same period. The results of checks of storage depots give an indication of the number of Ukrainian weapons present in Donbas. This week, monitors noted 330 items of military equipment were missing from Ukrainian armed forces' storage depots.

The Ukrainian Government is torpedoing the disengagement process. The Ukrainian armed forces refuse to withdraw personnel and arms from Stanytsia Luhanska, despite the fact that the Contact Group has already counted 15 seven-day periods of complete quiet. The security forces are destabilizing the situation in other disengagement areas too. In Petrivske, the SMM is recording ceasefire violations on an almost daily basis. In Zolote, an SMM unmanned aerial vehicle detected 169 mines within the disengagement area in territory on the government-controlled side.

The flare-up in Donbas began when Ukrainian armed forces and nationalist battalions occupied the villages of Travneve and Hladosove. Such provocations, which place the parties' positions closer to each other and thus increase the risk of military escalation, must end.

The "New Year" ceasefire, which the parties agreed on at the 20 December Contact Group meeting in Minsk, and which takes effect from 23 December, should defuse the situation. But there is no trust in the Ukrainian Government side; what is needed are firm guarantees that the ceasefire will be respected. We expect that, at the very least, the punitive battalions and Right Sector formations will be withdrawn from the line of contact. Orders for the Ukrainian armed forces not to use their weapons should be published.

But on the Ukrainian side the opposite is taking place: President Petro Poroshenko, and Oleksandr Turchynov, the man who launched the punitive operation, are calling for bolstering the military contingent in Donbas.

Unfortunately, the Ukrainian Government forces have used the withdrawal of Russian officers from the Joint Centre for Control and Co-ordination (JCCC) as a pretext for yet further intensifying shelling.

We have set out on many occasions the reasons for why the Russian officers' presence on Ukrainian territory was no longer possible. We discussed this issue regularly at the Permanent Council meetings and also during the Vienna Ministerial Council. But our voice was not heard, or rather, others did not want to listen. Furthermore, starting in September, the Russian Foreign Ministry sent the Ukrainian side four notes but has received no response. We drew attention to this problem in the Normandy format and in the Contact Group, but the Ukrainian side has ignored all of our requests. We are surprised that this decision has come as a surprise for some.

We recall that Russian officers came to Ukraine at the Ukrainian Government's request and made a significant contribution to stabilizing the situation. But the Ukrainian authorities no longer have an interest in this, seeing as how they have created conditions that make it impossible to continue working. The obstructions that Russian participants in the JCCC faced on Ukrainian Government-controlled territory are far more serious overall than are those that the SMM monitors encounter.

We are sure that the SMM can continue to work effectively in these conditions, strengthening its contacts with the local authorities in accordance with its mandate. We urge the SMM not to reduce, but to step up its activeness along the line of contact. We welcome the SMM visit to Travneve, which took place only after several weeks went by. They confirmed that members of the Aidar punitive battalion, known for their crimes, are present in the village.

We commend and appreciate the fact that the SMM monitored and verified the return home of Russian military personnel working in the JCCC. This was very important in order to prevent provocations. One incident did occur when an officer was detained at a Ukrainian checkpoint for around five hours. We cannot let such incidents pass without an appropriate response.

There is a clear link between the events in Donbas and the political storms in Kyiv. Demonstrations draw tens of thousands of veterans of punitive operations and radical nationalists to demand the impeachment of President Petro Poroshenko. We are following the actions of adventurist and war criminal Mikheil Saakashvili, who has called for heavy arms to be used against civilians. In this he is the twin brother of the current authorities in Kyiv. So-called activists constantly meddle in the work of the courts and law enforcement agencies. Is this what you think European standards of the rule of law look like? There have been renewed attempts to occupy buildings in Kyiv. This time, 32 police officers were injured during clashes at the October Palace. Some Western representatives deemed this an “abuse of the right to peaceful assembly”. But where were they looking in the winter of 2013–2014? Or did different rules apply back then?

In conclusion, we want to reiterate that the Minsk agreements are the only road to peaceful stabilization. Other options carry the risk of new victims and destruction. The Ukrainian Government has already tried them and there is no sense in repeating these attempts.

The worn-out Ukrainian speculation on foreign aggression and the invader army are no more than a propaganda veneer covering the desire to continue the conflict. These assertions do not fit well with, for example, inviting Russian officers in the JCCC to come to Ukraine.

Obstructing direct dialogue between the Ukrainian Government, Donetsk and Luhansk is in the same vein. Read the Minsk agreements more attentively. All of the key issues are to be decided with the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk, including the question of holding elections (point 12). Therefore, all talk to the effect that legitimate representatives will appear only after the holding of elections is a distortion of the Minsk agreements.

There is no basis for attempts to present the punitive operation against Donbas as a form of self-defence. The American and Canadian arms and equipment flooding into Ukraine incite the radical nationalists to undertake new military adventures and do not contribute to peace in the region or implementing the Minsk agreements. The latest development in US support for the authorities in Kyiv confirms that Ukraine has now become a territory under external rule. The state of Ukraine’s economy and military make it clear that the country is surviving thanks to foreign resources. What’s more, by arming the Kyiv authorities, the US

Government is becoming an accomplice in killing people who rose up against a nationalist-led coup d'état in Kyiv and defended their right to speak their native Russian language and their values system.

We propose that everyone who genuinely wants to end this crisis take a more active part in eliminating one of the key factors fuelling the conflict – aggressive radical nationalism in Ukraine. This core group of the “war party”, which is most actively obstructing the Minsk agreements’ implementation, spreading hate and demanding that the punitive operation continues until Donbas is completely “cleansed”, must be eradicated.