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**STATEMENT BY MR. VLADIMIR ZHEGLOV,
DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1321st MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

24 June 2021

On the report by the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine

Madam Chairperson,

We welcome the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine, the distinguished Ambassador Henrik Villadsen. We read with interest the report on the work of this field operation. The continuing massive violations of OSCE commitments in Ukraine against the backdrop of the Ukrainian Government's military operation against the population of Donbas demand the close attention of all our Organization's structures.

The leadership of Ukraine continues its policy of abusing the rights of the country's Russian-speaking inhabitants and national minorities. Restrictions have been deliberately introduced on the use by the non-Ukrainian-speaking inhabitants of their language in public and political life. As of January this year, a number of provisions of the Law on Ensuring the Functioning of Ukrainian as the State Language have come into force that significantly reduce the possibility of using languages other than Ukrainian in public life. More and more obstacles have been created to obtaining a full education in one's mother tongue. In fact, the true purpose of legislatively regulating the language sphere in Ukraine is not to popularize and develop the Ukrainian language but, rather, to force through a change in the cultural identity of non-Ukrainian-speaking citizens living in the country. The draft law on the indigenous peoples of Ukraine submitted by President Zelenskyy in May this year aims at segregation along ethnic lines. The Ukrainian Government's policy of forced Ukrainization is at odds with Ukraine's obligations under international law and the provisions of its Constitution.

Another sore point in contemporary Ukraine is the upsurge of aggressive nationalism, xenophobia and neo-Nazism, which began after the February 2014 coup and has been one of the factors deepening the social divide in the country. Mass marches through Ukrainian cities, including Kyiv, in honour of individuals and organizations tainted by their complicity with the Nazis during the Second World War have attracted widespread international attention. Aggressive nationalists put pressure on the authorities, civil society organizations and the media; they harass civic activists and even foreign diplomats.

We urge the Project Co-ordinator, together with the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Council of Europe's Venice Commission, to intensify work with the Ukrainian Government to rectify discriminatory legislative measures and overcome the negative consequences of their

implementation and to include these topics in human rights training programme. It is also important to build zero tolerance for neo-Nazism in Ukraine, not in words but in deeds. As for the so-called volunteer nationalist battalions, their activities deserve separate attention under the Co-ordinator's democratic control of the armed forces programme.

In his report, Mr. Villadsen points out that his Office is working actively with the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy on media issues. This is an area that needs to be considerably strengthened. The situation regarding freedom of the press in the country is still lamentable.

The Ukrainian authorities continue to cleanse the information sphere and are cranking up the persecution of journalists. The apotheosis of lawlessness was President Zelenskyy's decree of 2 February to give effect to the National Security and Defence Council decision on the application of personal special economic and other restrictive measures. As a result, several television channels – including three leading nationwide television news channels (112 Ukraine, NewsOne and ZIK) – have been forcibly shut down in an extrajudicial procedure. Later, in similar extrajudicial fashion, hundreds of information resources on the Internet were blocked simply for voicing views that did not coincide with those of the country's leadership. The authorities have obstructed investigations into the murder of numerous journalists, and the notorious Myrotvorets website operating from servers in the United States of America continues to “helpfully suggest” targets to radicals for future attacks by publishing the personal details of “undesirable” journalists and public figures. This is an area where an appropriate reaction from the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media is truly required.

We urge the Project Co-ordinator to actively assist the Ukrainian authorities in remedying these violations of OSCE commitments, working both with government representatives and with the public.

We have noticed, Mr. Villadsen, that you pay a great deal of attention to the rule of law, including judicial reform, legal education and the enforcement of court decisions. There are still many problems in this area in Ukraine. The most heinous crimes, committed under the banner of Ukrainian national exclusivity, remain unsolved. The failure of the authorities to fully investigate high-profile crimes such as the Maidan murders and the 2014 Odessa tragedy remains emblematic of the impotence of the law enforcement system. Against this background, legal nihilism is growing in the country, and extrajudicial methods for making short work of the opposition – for example, by imposing sanctions on the country's own citizens and even on members of the Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian Parliament) – are multiplying.

It is very important for the Co-ordinator's Office to raise all these issues in discussions both with Ukrainian officials and parliamentarians with a view to adjusting their policies, and with legal practitioners and law students.

One further point. The Ukrainian Government's continued punitive operation in the east of the country, the dispatch of military supplies to Ukraine from abroad combined with poor control over the movement of weapons and ammunition are all leading to a general deterioration of the security situation. The illicit circulation of arms is on the rise. According to the Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office, in recent years the people of Ukraine have had between 3 and 5 million unaccounted-for weapons in their possession. They are spreading not only from the zone of hostilities. A typical example was the attempt in May to bring around three thousand firearms into Ukraine from Romania through the Isaccea border crossing. We note that the Co-ordinator launched a project to counter illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons in January this year. A project of this nature is clearly particularly relevant in the current context. On their own, the Ukrainian authorities are obviously incapable of bringing about a fundamental change to the situation.

Mr. Villadsen,

It is our understanding that achieving these objectives is feasible within the framework of your ongoing programmatic activities. We appreciate that you liaise with the Ukrainian authorities on all aspects of this work. However, the Ukrainian Government's discourse on commitment to implementing existing OSCE commitments should be backed up by effective engagement with our Organization, its specialized institutions and its field operations in Ukraine. As Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine, you also play a major role in guiding the Ukrainian authorities towards such engagement. Including the aforementioned issues in your programmatic activities will contribute to remedying the Ukrainian Government's violations of OSCE commitments. In conclusion, let me wish you and your staff success in this challenging task and the best of health.

Thank you for your attention.