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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1283rd MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

1 October 2020

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

Mr. Chairperson,

The armed conflict in eastern Ukraine, each day of which continues to bring suffering to the people of Donbas on both sides of the line of contact, is nowhere near being resolved. Instead of effective steps to achieve peace on the basis of the Minsk agreements, the Ukrainian Government is discussing how “the reintegration of Donbas will take 25 years”, as, for example, Deputy Prime Minister Oleksiy Reznikov proposed in his address to the Verkhovna Rada on 17 September. What kind of message was he trying to convey to future generations of Ukrainians – that the Ukrainian Government does not intend to take a settlement seriously for another couple of decades?

The relative calm in Donbas, which is now in its tenth week since the measures to strengthen the ceasefire regime came into effect on 27 July, remains fragile. Last Saturday, 26 September, the media reported how mortar shelling had resulted in a fire that engulfed 15 buildings in the settlement of Dolomitne in the Donetsk region. Information on the damage caused to these buildings has not yet been reflected in the reports of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM). We call on the Mission to carefully study these facts and present the results of its monitoring.

Some supporters of the “war party” in Kyiv continue to ratchet up bellicose rhetoric, evidently in full awareness of the forthcoming local elections scheduled for 25 October. They do not hide the fact that they are effectively seeking to undermine the efforts to achieve peace. Suffice it to recall a recent pronouncement by one of the co-authors of the Minsk agreements, the fifth President of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko. On 23 September, he announced on the Dnipropetrovsk television channel “34” that he was prepared to personally compensate Ukrainian soldiers for the disciplinary penalties imposed on them for opening fire at the line of contact without being ordered to do so by their commanders and in violation of the measures to strengthen the ceasefire regime. It is hardly surprising that on precisely that day the SMM recorded one of the highest figures in terms of the number of such violations in recent weeks. On the same day, it was reported that a member of the militia had been injured by sniper fire near the settlement of Dzerzhynske in the Donetsk region. I wonder how many such incidents the former President has sponsored so far.

Against this background, Ukraine’s foreign “minders” continue to stir up the militaristic aspirations of those in favour of solving “the Donbas problem” by force. For example, in mid-September the command

and staff exercise “Rapid Trident 2020” took place in the Lviv region under the watchful eye of marines from the United States of America and with the involvement of soldiers from a number of other NATO countries. It is significant that the exercise scenario included the “liberation of an occupied region” and its “stabilization”, and among the primary tasks was practising urban warfare. That exercise was followed by another one, namely “Joint Endeavour 2020”, during which US strategic bombers (B-52Hs) entered Ukrainian airspace. The demonstrative flights by US tiltrotor military aircraft (CV-22B Ospreys), which practically made a mockery of the country’s statehood and which were conducted at very low altitudes over Kyiv and a number of other cities, added nothing to the feeling of a peaceful sky over Ukraine. Specifically, they practised airdrop training exercises.

In these circumstances, we see attempts to undermine the political and diplomatic settlement, notably through unprecedented pressure on certain members of the Ukrainian delegation to the negotiations in the Minsk-based Trilateral Contact Group (TCG).

On 29 September, while addressing the members of the Verkhovna Rada, the first deputy head of the Ukrainian delegation at the TCG, Vitold Fokin, spoke of the need to adhere strictly to the letter of the Package of Measures of 12 February 2015. As is well known, this road map for a settlement of the internal Ukrainian crisis (endorsed by United Nations Security Council resolution 2202) provides for comprehensive political reforms, including decentralization and granting certain areas of Donbas special status on a permanent basis, a general amnesty and the organization of local elections through direct dialogue with the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk.

Responding to propagandistic attacks, Mr. Fokin emphasized in particular the absence of any reliable evidence that would confirm that some kind of “war between Russia and Ukraine” was being waged in Donbas. A little earlier, in an interview on Ukrainian Radio, he mentioned that the conflict in Donbas began with the attempts of the new authorities in 2014 to carry out the forced Ukrainization of the population as one of their first policies. In his opinion, the current leadership of the country is continuing this misguided practice under circumstances where the imposition of the Ukrainian language not only contravenes the Constitution, but is also not in line with the opinion of the overwhelming Russian-speaking majority of its inhabitants.

The most radical among the parliamentarians immediately seized upon this and demanded that criminal proceedings be instituted against Mr. Fokin for high treason. Evidently under pressure from these deputies, the Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine, Andriy Yermak, also spoke out and suggested that Mr. Fokin resign from his position in the TCG. The next day, on 30 September, the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, dismissed Mr. Fokin from his post – by the sound of things because the latter’s public statements were closer to reality than to the false narrative being foisted on the Ukrainian people nowadays about so-called Russian aggression.

One may recall other examples when, under pressure from the nationalists, the Ukrainian Government obstructed the development of dialogue with representatives of Donbas on the basis of an objective interpretation of reality. One such example from this year was the failed launch in March of the National Platform for Reconciliation and Unity. It had been proposed by an adviser to the secretary of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine, Serhiy Syvokho, who, incidentally, was also removed from his post soon after he had attempted to present this platform.

Also alarming are the endeavours by certain Ukrainian representatives to discredit the Minsk-based negotiation platform. Recently, the deputy head of the Ukrainian delegation at the TCG, Oleksiy Reznikov, stated that he was henceforth ruling out both for himself and for the other Ukrainian negotiators the possibility of face-to-face work in Minsk even once the coronavirus pandemic was over. Against this

background, it is not surprising that the TCG meeting held via videoconference on 30 September once again did not lead to any tangible progress in the settlement. During the meeting, the Ukrainian Government's representatives refused to consider the detailed list of additional measures to strengthen the ceasefire regime, which envisages a procedure for conducting inspections to check for potential violations.

Discussions on the remaining issues have effectively been blocked by the fact that the Verkhovna Rada resolution (no. 795-XI) on the scheduling of regular local elections in 2020 remains in force. I would remind you that this resolution excludes Donbas from the electoral processes and contravenes the provisions of paragraphs 4, 9, 11 and 12 of the Package of Measures. The Ukrainian negotiators continue to pull the wool over people's eyes saying that the revision of this resolution will be considered in the relevant Verkhovna Rada committee, while the Chairperson of the Ukrainian Parliament, Dmytro Razumkov, says that this item is not even on the agenda. In that connection, the Ukrainian Government's representatives are systematically distorting the progress and results of the discussions in the TCG in their public statements, effectively hiding the truth from the Ukrainian public as to what is happening. In this regard, the issue of ensuring information transparency of the ongoing negotiations within the framework of the TCG is of particular importance.

Incidentally, under the current conditions, representatives of Russia will not observe the local elections in the rest of Ukraine on 25 October. This is due not only to the absurd approach of the Ukrainian Government, which has ruled out the possibility of Russian citizens participating in election monitoring on Ukrainian territory, but also to the double standards of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), which is once again turning a blind eye to such discrimination.

Mr. Chairperson,

It is around this time that we remember the 79th anniversary of the tragedy of Babi Yar, where, in 1941, tens of thousands of Ukrainians – Jews and other ethnic groups – were shot. It is well known that the Nazi occupiers and their local henchmen from among those who promoted the ideas of Ukrainian national exclusivity committed this monstrous crime.

Unfortunately, the terrible lessons of history have still not been learned in present-day Ukraine. The number of nationalist organizations receiving government funding has multiplied since the coup d'état of 2014. At the beginning of this year, the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports of Ukraine allocated funds from the budget to 165 community projects. By means of a competition, the money was distributed among "national-patriotic" associations, including ultra-right radicals. They received 8 million hryvnias altogether, which was almost half the total sum available.

One did not have to wait long to see the outcome of such dubious patriotic education. Already in August, the SMM reported on the most visible manifestations of intolerance accompanied by violence, namely shots being fired at a bus and opposition activists being beaten up in Liubotyn in the Kharkiv region (report dated 28 August), an attack on a synagogue in Mariupol (report dated 1 September) and clashes with members of the Roma community in the settlement of Andriivka in the Kharkiv region (report dated 8 September). We would remind you in this context of the long-overdue need for the SMM to catalogue information on manifestations of aggressive nationalism, neo-Nazism and xenophobia in a dedicated thematic report.

Once again, we note that the crisis in Ukraine is the result of the February 2014 coup d'état, which was orchestrated, funded and organized from abroad and has led to the armed confrontation in Donbas and the wholesale suffering of millions of civilians.

We call on the OSCE and Ukraine's external "minders" to bring maximum influence to bear on the Ukrainian leadership in order to induce it to act in the interests of peace and civil harmony, with a view to swift implementation of the Package of Measures on the basis of direct and meaningful dialogue between the Ukrainian Government and the authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk.

Thank you for your attention.