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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1140th (SPECIAL) MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

5 April 2017

**On the situation in Ukraine and the activities there of the
OSCE Special Monitoring Mission**

Mr. Chairperson,

We thank the Political Director of the Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs of Austria, Ambassador Alexander Marschik, the Secretary General of the OSCE, Ambassador Lamberto Zannier, the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine and in the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG), Ambassador Martin Sajdik, the Chief Monitor of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), Ambassador Ertuğrul Apakan, and the Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mr. Patrick Vial, for their assessments of the situation in eastern Ukraine.

A settlement of the intra-Ukrainian conflict is possible only through direct dialogue between the Ukrainian Government, Donetsk and Luhansk, and comprehensive implementation by the parties of the Minsk Package of Measures, to which there is no alternative.

Since 1 April, following the TCG decisions of 29 March, the situation in Donbas had begun to improve somewhat; however, we are now, unfortunately, observing a resumption of large-scale violations of the ceasefire regime. The parties have submitted partial information on their weapons in the vicinity of the line of contact. More effort needs to be made for a lasting ceasefire and the withdrawal of military equipment, and to rule out the very possibility of resumed shelling of towns, villages and infrastructure facilities.

Despite the significant reduction in the violations of the ceasefire regime, the SMM informs us of exchanges of gunfire and artillery engagement. In the night of 1 to 2 April, SMM cameras in Shyrokyne and Avdiivka recorded the use of combat systems provoked by firing from west/north-west to east/south-east, in other words the Ukrainian armed forces opened fire first.

As of 2 April, the Ukrainian security forces had not withdrawn from the line of contact 67 units of large-calibre artillery, which had been sighted in Artemivsk, Zhelanne, Kostiantynivka, Kulykivske and Tarasivka in violation of the Package of Measures.

Exchanges of fire have been recorded in Stanytsia Luhanska inside the area where the disengagement of forces is scheduled for 6 April. On 29 March, the camera installed there recorded a shot fired from north to south, in other words from positions held by the Ukrainian armed forces, against militia-controlled territory, which resulted in another exchange of fire.

Recently, increased attention is being drawn to incidents involving SMM monitors – small arms are used near SMM patrols, and the monitors have even come under mortar fire. The Ukrainian Government periodically accuses the monitors of being Russian spies. The safety of the monitors is very important. We call on the parties to treat them with respect. There are 40 Russian citizens working in the Mission, operating in the same difficult conditions as their colleagues from other participating States of the OSCE.

The possibilities of the SMM are not unlimited and they cannot record every instance of shelling. Nevertheless, the Mission is obliged to work according to the principles of objectivity and impartiality, to carry out equal monitoring on both sides of the line of contact, without being subjected to pressure from the host country.

It is necessary to increase the Donbas population's level of trust in the SMM, demonstrate more actively the results of the monitors' work, cover in more depth topics that are of most interest to the local inhabitants, and hold more frequent briefings not only in Kyiv but also in Donetsk and Luhansk. People are waiting for a consolidated report on the consequences of the shelling of towns and villages in Donbas since the beginning of the conflict. The level of trust in the Mission will very much depend on this.

In that context, reports of a "fake SMM" in government-controlled territory of Donbas are extremely alarming. On two occasions – 4 and 31 March – a white sport utility vehicle (SUV) with an imitation OSCE SMM logo was spotted in a number of Ukrainian armed force-controlled locations in Avdiivka. This is far more dangerous for the Mission's image and safety than any articles in newspapers or on the Internet. How can we now be sure that the occupants of a white SUV are SMM monitors and not Ukrainian soldiers?

We firmly believe that greater co-operation with the Joint Centre for Control and Co-ordination (JCCC) would help to increase the effectiveness of the SMM without compromising the monitors' safety. By the same token, the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk should return to their work in the JCCC. Refusing to take this step indicates better than any words the unwillingness of the Ukrainian Government in practice to create an effective verification regime for implementation of the existing agreements in the area adjacent to the line of contact.

Priority should obviously be given to monitoring the line of contact – to the cessation of hostilities, documenting that there are no prohibited weapons in this area, verifying the withdrawal/disengagement of forces and hardware. This also applies to monitoring using technical equipment.

The situation in eastern Ukraine is directly contingent on what is happening in the other regions of the country and the development of the domestic political situation. There is

an increasing threat of “anarchy and the ataman” in Ukraine (according to President Petro Poroshenko), and the rampant excesses of radical nationalists are spreading. Under pressure from the radicals, the government is encouraging the trade and transport blockade of Donbas. Anti-constitutional draft laws encroaching on the linguistic rights of the Russian-speaking population and other national minorities living in Ukraine are being discussed in the Verkhovna Rada. De-Russification has been elevated to the level of State policy. The situation regarding freedom of speech is deteriorating. Churches, monuments and gravestones are being desecrated. Attacks are carried out on foreign diplomatic missions.

All of this falls under the mandate of the SMM and deserves close attention from the Mission. In order to avoid speculation about distortion and manipulation, we expect detailed reports from the SMM, including thematic ones, on these issues. The Mission has the staffing to do so. A large amount of the information received from the monitors, unfortunately, does not end up in the reports. We call upon the OSCE Mission and Secretariat not to keep all this to themselves and to share it with the participating States.

We welcome the intensification of the TCG’s work and the results of the meeting on 29 March. We trust that they will finally make it possible to move from the stage of military confrontation to political settlement and the implementation of the relevant provisions of the Package of Measures. The inhabitants of Donbas need legal and material guarantees for the observance of their rights. This requires the enactment of the law on special status and its consolidation in the Ukrainian Constitution, the holding of local elections, and the assurance that people will not be prosecuted in connection with the events in eastern Ukraine. It will be impossible to reintegrate Donbas into the Ukrainian economic and legal space without restoring the humanitarian, economic and financial ties that have been severed by the Ukrainian authorities, for example by lifting the blockade and the *de facto* border regime at the line of contact.

Work in the TCG Working Group on Political Issues remains blocked. Ukraine is unwilling to even set out on paper the “Steinmeier formula”, which provides for the holding of elections and the enactment of the law on the special status on Donbas. We are counting on a political signal from the OSCE participating States regarding the need to implement the Package of Measures in full.

The punitive operation, which has now been going on for three years, has resulted in countless victims, destruction and suffering among the population of the region. Many were forced to leave their homes, move abroad, some of them to Russia. The situation has been aggravated by the Ukrainian Government’s decision to refuse to pay pensions and social benefits to the inhabitants of Donbas, the establishment of a *de facto* border regime at the line of contact and the legitimization of the trade and transport blockade initiated by the nationalists. The Ukrainian Government’s tactic is aimed at the socio-economic strangulation of the refractory population. The regular shelling of the Donetsk filtration plant and disruptions to the water supply in the Luhansk region are part of this policy.

We support the access of people in need to humanitarian assistance. Establishing closer co-operation with the authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk on the part of the humanitarian organizations concerned would help considerably. Those who intend to provide humanitarian support without a political reason, as experience has shown, have an opportunity to do so.

The situation of the population affected by the conflict would be improved by a cessation of hostilities, an end to the shelling of residential areas and infrastructure facilities, the withdrawal of heavy weapons, the lifting of all restrictions when crossing the line of contact – and not only the opening of additional crossing points, but also the lifting of the trade and transport blockade in all its forms. Our efforts should be directed towards this.

Thank you for your attention.