

**Update by Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine
and in the Trilateral Contact Group, Amb. Martin Sajdik,
in the OSCE Permanent Council**

Vienna, 19 January 2017

Mr. Chairperson,
Distinguished Ambassadors,
Dear Colleagues and Friends,

I would like to thank the new Austrian Chairmanship for inviting Amb. Apakan and me to the Permanent Council to inform you about our efforts and the state of play of a peaceful settlement of the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

I just had the honour to accompany the new Chairperson in Office, the Austrian FM Sebastian Kurz, on his visit to Kyiv and Moscow. I appreciate that the conflict in eastern Ukraine figures prominently on the agenda of the new Chairmanship. The WG Coordinators and I look forward to continuing the excellent co-operation with the Chairmanship which we have enjoyed, throughout last year, with Germany.

Last Monday we met in Minsk for this year's first round of sessions of the Trilateral Contact Group and its four Working groups, including consultations with CADLR. The discussions demonstrated the awareness of their participants and the inter-national officials engaged in the Minsk process of the expectations of the population of the whole Ukraine but also of the public opinion beyond Ukraine that we have to work much harder to reach tangible progress towards a peaceful settlement in east-ern Ukraine.

But first, let me look back on the recent weeks with some positive but also negative developments:

Most importantly, let me recall that at our meeting on 21 December we achieved a renewed commitment of the TCG and the representatives from CADLR to a full and permanent respect of the ceasefire in eastern Ukraine. This agreement has entered into force on 24 December and managed to curb a massive upsurge in fighting, which we had witnessed the days and weeks before Christmas. At the same time, you all know from the SMM reports that compliance – compared to our previous ceasefire initiative for the start of the school year last September – has not been satisfactory and the number of violations has risen again. A major problem remains the failure to withdraw heavy and Addendum-regulated weapons. Those weapons, together with mines, continue to affect civilians, and civilian infrastructure, in the first place. Let me illustrate this unbearable situation with a quote from the last SMM Weekly Report (issued on 12 January) referring to last month's situation on both sides of the line of contact:

"On 21 December in Sakhanka [CADR-controlled], the employee of a school told the SMM that the school had been closed for a week due to shelling and that children were suffering from trauma due to the ongoing fighting. On 23 December in government-controlled

Talakovka, the SMM spoke with four residents who said they were exhausted from months of hearing outgoing fire and the constant fear of return fire. They told the SMM that shelling during the day had recently been so close that children had to seek cover in the school's shelter." (end of quote).

In the humanitarian field, I have welcomed recent goodwill gestures from both sides, notably the release of 15 detainees by the Ukrainian side and of three persons by CADLR at the end of December. A videoconference of the Humanitarian WG scheduled for the middle of next week is to further discuss the possibility of a release of a substantial number of detainees.

On another positive note, since the beginning of January water and electricity deliveries have been resumed to CALR, thus implementing an agreement concluded between two local provider companies ("Popasnjansky Rayonnyi Vodokanal" and "Dzherelo Novogo Zhittya") back in August 2016. This demonstrates that the sides are able to work out mutually acceptable solutions despite the difficult circumstances. At the same time, we will see if this ad hoc arrangement can set a precedent for future transactions. A sustainable mechanism for water and electricity deliveries and their payment still needs to be agreed on in the near future, and a solution for the Economic WG, which could not yet resume its formal work, remains to be found.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As these few examples show, we have managed to keep our Minsk process on track in a challenging environment. For what-ever reasons during the past months it has been close to impossible to persuade the sides to make substantial commitments at this stage. Yet, I am convinced that playing for time is not a viable option for anybody in this conflict. We therefore have no other choice not only to continue our work but also to make it more effective.

Our main conclusions remain valid: (1) Security is key for advancing on political, humanitarian and economic issues. (2) Security can be established, and security commitments can be respected, if the sides demonstrate the necessary political will.

Unfortunately, we continue to observe a lack of political will. And we must not accept that this lack of political will has severe consequences on the civilian population in eastern Ukraine, which continues to suffer. Therefore, the protection of the civilian population is my, and the Coordinators', major goal at this stage.

We will put humanitarian and economic aspects even more in the focus of our work. The Minsk agreements provide us with a wide-ranging concept of a sustainable conflict resolution: Beyond the immediate removal of security risks such as heavy weapons and mines, and beyond the necessary legal-political framework, a sustainable conflict resolution should also

- include ensuring acceptable living conditions for the local population such as reliable water and energy supply
- as well as establish viable socio-economic ties – which would also require functioning financial services.

Implementing those measures would also help to re-build trust, which is essential for moving forward with the other elements of Minsk.

I welcome that the leaders and foreign ministers of the Normandy format, during their recent meetings, devoted special attention to social and humanitarian issues as well. You also heard, a week ago, the strong commitment of CiO Kurz that, I quote, "the well-being of the populations and communities must once again be at the forefront of all political endeavours". I appreciate your continued support, which further motivates us not to keep up our efforts and to further strengthen them.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.