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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
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1326th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

29 July 2021

**On the deteriorating situation in Ukraine and the continued non-implementation by the
Ukrainian authorities of the Minsk agreements**

Mr. Chairperson,

The results of the OSCE's work, for the first six months of 2021, on the internal Ukrainian crisis prompt disappointing conclusions. A deadlocked situation may be observed all round. The state of affairs in Ukraine remains dire – both in terms of the settlement of the conflict in the east of the country and in terms of the implementation of OSCE commitments in general. We will talk separately today about the massive violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Ukraine.

The implementation of the key instrument for ending the conflict – the Package of Measures of 12 February 2015 – continues to be sabotaged by the Ukrainian authorities, which refuse to engage in substantive dialogue with the representatives of Donbas. There has been no progress on the political track with regard to enshrining a special status for certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions on a permanent basis, or with regard to an amnesty and the organization of local elections. The Ukrainian Government is stubbornly avoiding the incorporation of the compromise “Steinmeier formula” into the country's legislation. Contrary to paragraph 8 of the Package of Measures, the economic and transport blockade, which is intended to strangle the region, remains in place.

The measures agreed upon a year ago by the Ukrainian Government and the authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk at the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) to bolster the ceasefire made an important contribution at the time to de-escalating the situation. But the relatively positive backdrop that they created has failed to get the Ukrainian leadership to abandon its belligerent aspirations. And this is despite the clear conclusions of the Normandy Four's Paris summit of 9 December 2019, which confirmed the urgent need both for immediate measures to stabilize the situation in the conflict zone and for measures to implement the political provisions of the Minsk agreements.

Over the past six months, the Ukrainian Government has not taken a single step of its own to bring peace any closer in Donbas. Not a single legislative initiative has been introduced with a view to fulfilling its obligations under the Package of Measures. Instead there are ever more legislative innovations that only complicate the settlement process. On 23 July, President Zelenskyy signed Decree No. 307 enacting the National Security and Defence Council decision on urgent measures to deepen Ukraine's integration into

NATO. Accession to the North Atlantic Alliance is treated in that decision as one of the most important tasks of the State, and instructions are given to simplify the procedures for the deployment of foreign troops in Ukraine. In this way, the military exploitation of “independent Ukraine” by foreign States is continuing and conditions are being created for further military exercises involving the rehearsal of offensive operations, which is clearly not conducive to implementation of the Minsk agreements. And why has there been no decree on the implementation of all the provisions of the Package of Measures?

The draft law introduced by a group of members of the Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian Parliament) on the automatic loss of Ukrainian citizenship for those persons who have obtained Russian citizenship is yet another example of the attempts to divide society. At the same time, it is customary for Ukraine to blame Russia for its own mistakes and inaction.

The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Reintegration, Oleksiy Reznikov, said on 27 July that the Government of Ukraine plans to submit to the Verkhovna Rada a draft law on the transitional period in Donbas, which is allegedly aimed at the region’s “de-occupation and safe reintegration”. In practice, the document undermines the implementation of the Minsk agreements in every respect and rules out the possibility of a political settlement on the basis of the Package of Measures altogether.

Instead of taking practical steps to implement the Minsk agreements, the Ukrainian authorities are turning out a large number of assorted strange proposals. For example, President Zelenskyy does not rule out in his statements that an additional format for negotiations on Donbas is possible, which would operate in parallel with the Normandy format. The Ukrainian Government is doing all this in order to divert attention from its failure to fulfil its obligations under the Minsk agreements and the arrangements agreed on at the “Normandy format” level. Otherwise, how else can one explain the fact that Mr. Zelenskyy floated the idea of creating a parallel track to the “Normandy format” negotiations not in dialogue with Ukraine’s partners, but in conversation with the press? The ideas coming out of Kyiv about a possible expansion of the participants in the Normandy format are also baffling.

Such actions appear to be fully in keeping with the Ukrainian leadership’s logic that the Minsk agreements and the negotiation process for a settlement itself are necessary only to maintain the pressure of sanctions on Russia. We would remind you that the President of Ukraine expressly stated this at a press conference in Kyiv on 20 May 2020 and then repeated it in an interview with *Focus* magazine on 25 December 2020. This line has merely become more pronounced since then. On 28 July, at the “Ukraine 30 – Decentralization” forum, Mr. Zelenskyy spoke once more about his readiness to meet in the Normandy format, but again shifted all responsibility for the fate of Donbas exclusively on to Russia. Furthermore, the Ukrainian Government is stubbornly blocking the TCG’s return to Minsk for face-to-face meetings. Sabotaging the discussions remotely is evidently more convenient. Incidentally, the continuation of work in Minsk is supported by all the other participants in the TCG.

Amidst the lack of progress on political issues, the Ukrainian Government is persistently maintaining tension in Donbas and refusing to work out practical mechanisms to ensure the implementation of the agreed measures of 22 July 2020. For example, there has been no progress with regard to the creation and involvement of a co-ordination mechanism for responding to ceasefire violations through the facilitation of the Joint Centre for Control and Co-ordination in its current setting, that is, with the participation of representatives of the Ukrainian armed forces and of the armed formations of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that tensions persist in Donbas despite the measures in place to support the ceasefire. Over the past week, the number of violations, although somewhat reduced, still stands at more than 600 incidents, including more than 80 explosions. A complete ceasefire is still a

long way off. On 28 July, there were reports of further shelling by the Ukrainian armed forces: three settlements – Zaitseve, Vesele and Leninske – were hit by 120 mm calibre bombs and grenades.

The civilian population and infrastructure continue to be harmed. It is cause for alarm that the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) has reported 80 instances of damage to residential buildings and infrastructure facilities since the start of the year. The monitors have recorded 66 ceasefire violations, including nine explosions, near the most important public facility in the region – the Donetsk filtration station. We urge the SMM to verify all information on civilian casualties and destruction as quickly as possible and to continue to catalogue such data.

The Mission again noted numerous instances of interference with the operation of its unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). It is telling that the SMM monitors recorded the presence of a Ukrainian electronic warfare system in the settlement of Starohnativka (Donetsk region). We recall that it was at the SMM base in Stepanivka, 20 km from this location behind the lines of the Ukrainian armed forces, that the Mission's UAVs experienced systematic jamming, which resulted in the loss of one of their long-range devices. At the same time, the SMM continues to record flights by UAVs, the use of which is prohibited under the measures of July 2020. For example, an unidentified aerial vehicle was spotted by the monitors on 21 July near the settlement of Lebedynske, which is controlled by the Ukrainian armed forces.

President Zelenskyy recently dismissed the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Ruslan Khomchak, citing a “lack of synergy between the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine and the armed forces”. We are counting on the new Ukrainian military leadership to refrain from adventures and provocations in Donbas and strictly adhere to the Ukrainian Government's obligations under the settlement process.

In closing, we recall that the stabilization of Donbas and a long-term sustainable settlement of the internal Ukrainian crisis depend on the political will of the Ukrainian Government to find practical solutions, together with the authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk, to fulfil the obligations undertaken within the Minsk framework. The appointment of new TCG co-ordinators gives hope for fresh momentum in the peace process. We call on the OSCE Chairmanship to make every effort to that end.

Thank you for your attention.