

Statement by Permanent Representative of Russia to the OSCE Alexander Lukashevich at the OSCE Permanent Council meeting, Vienna, January 25, 2018

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*on the situation in Ukraine*

*and the importance of fulfilling the Minsk Agreements*

Mr Chairperson,

Our view of the Ukrainian conflict remains unchanged. It is crucial that the Minsk Agreements are fulfilled in their entirety through a direct dialogue between Kiev, Donetsk and Lugansk. We are ready to offer our assistance in every way possible.

Despite the New Year ceasefire, Kiev is building up its military activity at the contact line in Donbass and provoking an escalation of the conflict. On January 21, the Ukrainian security forces opened fire at a bus with 50 civilians near the town of Yelenovka. One person was killed, one more injured. The Special Monitoring Mission confirmed that the attack was carried out from the Ukrainian Armed Forces' positions in its January 22 report. On January 22, an infantry combat vehicle and a mortar gun were used to attack Dokuchayevsk. Five people were injured.

Over the period between January 15-21, the observers spotted 26 military weapons of the Ukrainian Army in violation of the Minsk Agreements and 89 heavy arms of the same forces directly outside the withdrawal lines.

Fresh trenches have been discovered leading from the Ukrainian Army's position to a water-pumping station in Vasilyevka, a crucial facility of the civilian infrastructure. The Ukrainian Armed Forces are provoking exchanges of fire near the Donetsk filtration plant as well.

The Special Monitoring Mission has recorded 450 cases of unaccounted for artillery guns, mortars and tanks of the Ukrainian Armed Forces that disappeared from their storage facilities. We are warning Kiev officials against any risky military undertakings in an attempt to set up authority over Donbass by force. We hope that the Special Monitoring Mission will intensify its monitoring, which may have a restraining effect on the Ukrainian Army.

Verkhovna Rada's bill on reintegrating Donbass is another step towards escalation. The bill is a de jure affirmation of Kiev's refusal to perform the Minsk Agreements in addition to their actual sabotaging. This unilateral measure on Kiev's part will only aggravate the conflict. All the matters regarding the Donbass conflict resolution under the Minsk Package of Measures must be agreed upon between Kiev, Donetsk and Lugansk.

We would like to hear an explanation of how the said bill corresponds with the provisions of the Minsk Agreements on amnesty in relation to Donbass events, with the law on the special status of Donbass and with the holding of local elections, the modalities of which must be agreed with Donetsk and Lugansk representatives.

The bill qualifies the government forces' actions in Donbass as a military operation. All security and law-enforcement services must report to the military. The President is granted the right to approve "the operation staff," which can use force against civilians across the country without declaring martial law. Ukrainian officials are absolving themselves of responsibility for their actions as they hide behind the imaginary enemy figure they see in Russia. Representatives of several areas in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions who signed the Minsk Agreements are referred to as "occupation administration."

Thus, Kiev is legalising its violent scenario for solving the Donbass problem and the Ukrainian President is given the right to use the army to suppress dissent in the country. Moreover, the bill in fact justifies supplies of lethal weapons to Ukraine which will be used to kill civilians in Donbass.

On the contrary, to stabilise the situation it is necessary to stop the punitive operation regardless of whether it is called an 'anti-terrorist operation' or given another name. Orders to the Ukrainian Armed Forces that prohibit the use of weapons must be published. Nationalist armed units must be removed from the conflict zone and subsequently disbanded. Heavy armaments must be withdrawn to storage facilities. Finally, it is time to implement the disengagement of forces in the area of Stanitsa Luganskaya.

Let me remind you that the issue of Kiev regaining control of the border will be resolved only when a comprehensive political settlement is achieved as specified in the Package of Measures. It cannot be pretended that there are no political obligations under this document approved by a UN Security Council resolution.

We welcome the January 6 order from the administration of several districts in the Donetsk region that prohibits creating obstacles for the Special Monitoring Mission observers. Overall, last week the observers confronted restrictions 22 times in the government-controlled territory and 12 times beyond it.

We urge the OSCE mission leaders to strengthen cooperation with Donbass officials. It is important to use local opportunities for performing the tasks that were earlier assisted with by Russian officers from the Joint Coordination and Control Centre.

Escalation in Donbass is directly related to the political turbulence in Ukraine. Nationalistic hysteria is manifested, among other things, in the discriminatory law on education, on television and radio broadcasting, in the toughened entry rules to Ukraine, in the encouragement of attacks on the Orthodox Church and, most importantly, in the incitement of militarist sentiments.

The Special Monitoring Mission reported that during a rally in Kiev on January 16, members of the Donbass voluntary battalion and the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists, wearing bulletproof vests and armed with batons, set car tyres on fire. On the same day, there was an attack on the Socialist Party's office in Dnepropetrovsk. The other week, radicals present in courtroom forced the court in Odessa to acquit an instigator of mass riots.

This is a powerful tool to put pressure on the authorities. The nationalists are denying the rule of law and dictating their own rules to courts and local governments. They remain one of the biggest obstacles in the way of peaceful settlement. Kiev's readiness to honestly fulfill the Minsk Agreements can be judged, among other things, by the measures it takes to restrain radical nationalists.

In conclusion, we would like, once again, to warn Kiev and its supporters against any attempts to enforce the military scenario. We must all work towards establishing peace in Ukraine as soon as possible.

Thank you.