

Remarks by Russia's Permanent Representative to the OSCE Alexander Lukashevich at a meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council on the situation in Ukraine and the need to implement the Minsk Agreements, Vienna, May 31, 2018

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Mr Chairperson,

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Kiev continues to escalate tensions in Donbass. The price is human lives. Between May 18 and 25, as a result of continued shooting by the Ukrainian Armed Forces, nine people have been killed and 17 wounded and dozens of civilian properties have been destroyed.

According to the SMM report, in the first two weeks of May the Ukrainian Armed Forces concentrated 110 pieces of military hardware in the "security zone." The troops have occupied the disengagement areas of Zolotoye and Petrovskoye, turning them into strongholds with military equipment. On May 12, an abortive attempt was made at a tank breakthrough near Gorlovka. The SMM reports four civilian deaths, two civilian injuries and destroyed houses as a result of massive shelling of Gorlovka and its vicinity (Zaitsevo) by Ukrainian Armed Forces on May 18-22. Reports of May 24 and 26 corroborate Ukrainian shelling of Gorlovka from Akatsiya 152 mm self-propelled howitzers from the village of Romanovka.

The situation is critical around the Donetsk Filtration Station (DFS) which supplies water to half a million people on both sides of the contact line. The Ukrainian forces seek to seize this infrastructure facility. They have approached to within less than 70 metres of the DFS. They conduct daily shelling (including on May 31) and obstruct access for workers. An immediate disengagement of forces from the station is needed. The self-defence forces are willing to do this, but Kiev is not. At yesterday's meeting of the Contact Group, Kiev representatives rejected the proposals made by Ambassador Ertugrul Apakan (6 points) on stabilising the situation around the DFS.

Fresh provocations were staged on May 22. SMM corroborates that as a result of shelling, a social relief and administrative services centre on self-defence forces-controlled territory near Stanitsa Luganskaya has been damaged. On that same day, two civilians were injured when a bridge blown up by Ukrainian saboteurs collapsed near Ivanovka.

Civilians on Kiev-controlled territory also suffer because of the fighting unleashed by the army. The Ukrainian forces have occupied hospitals in the city of Toretsk and a factory in Talakovka. As a result, civilians are being held hostage to the situation because these places were turned into battle theatres.

The only way to de-escalation is a ceasefire and withdrawal of hardware in accordance with the Minsk Package of Measures, disengagement of forces and demining as prescribed by the Contact Group. Principal Deputy Chief Monitor Alexander Hug told a briefing in Vienna on May 22. This was discussed at an emergency meeting of the security working subgroup of the Contact Group on May 23. However, the Ukrainian side sabotaged the negotiations and rejected the SMM's proposals.

Kiev is set for confrontation. It is pursuing a course of undermining the efforts to settle the crisis, unleashing full-scale hostilities similar to those of 2014. On May 28, tanks and artillery were moved toward the contact line at Dzerzhinsk. On May 29, Ukrainian military aircraft were in the air over Donbass. The press centre of the punitive "combined forces operation" command announced "the preparation of all the troops and hardware for performing assigned tasks."

The international community should not turn a blind eye to such actions. It is high time for sober-minded people in Europe to ask themselves whether it is worthwhile giving unqualified support to the policy of those who under current conditions provide Kiev with weapons and train Ukrainian punitive forces.

Kiev tries to hide the real state of affairs from Ukrainian citizens and the international community. It has stepped up propaganda concerning mythical "Russian aggression." It is crudely cleansing the information space. Ukraine is rapidly descending into totalitarianism.

On May 18, Ukrainian forces targeted a VGTRK television crew which was preparing a report near the village of Krutaya Balka. Russian journalist Pavel Vydrin and sound engineer Igor Uklein were wounded. On May 24, the Ukrainian authorities shut down Russia Today and RIA Novosti-Ukraine Russian news agencies for three years. Access to the sites of the Russian news agencies was blocked in spite of the condemnation of this discriminatory act by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, some key human rights NGOs and journalists' groups. A court in Kherson shelved the appeal against the arrest of Kirill Vyshinsky, the head of the RIA Novosti-Ukraine portal. On May 26, the Ukrainian border service prevented two Russian media people from entering Ukraine.

What happened to the Russian journalist Arkady Babchenko defies common sense. As you know, yesterday on May 30, the Ukrainian Security Service announced that the reporter is actually alive and his "pseudo-murder" was staged as part of some kind of special operation.

We are of course glad that the Russian citizen is alive. But we consider it unacceptable to use false information, especially when a human life is in question, for obvious propaganda ploys.

The reports about the death of Arkady Babchenko in Ukraine misled the world community. The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Harlem Desir even went to Kiev to support the journalist's colleagues and found himself in a very embarrassing situation.

Egged on by Kiev, some media outlets and bloggers hastened to accuse Russia of the murder which had not taken place. That, by the way, shows how strong groundless anti-Russian stereotypes are.

This whole circus was staged instead of investigating the real murders in Ukraine of journalists Anatoly Klyan, Anton Voloshin, Igor Kornelyuk, Andrey Stenin, Oles Buzina, Pavel Sheremet and other media people as well as the deaths of those who were burned alive in Odessa.

The credibility of Kiev's policy in the eyes of the international community has been seriously undermined. We are confident that the participating states, the OSCE institutions, the journalistic community and the relevant international institutions will draw corresponding conclusions from this situation.

Mr Chairperson,

The situation in the rest of Ukraine is dismal. The rights of ethnic minorities are being violated. Like the Russian-speaking population, they are deprived of the opportunity to receive education in their native language without obstruction. The children of Crimean Tatars have to organise classes consisting of at least five pupils in order to support their ethnic identity. Crimes on ethnic grounds continue. According to SMM reports, on May 22, Right Sector radicals attacked Roma people in the Bolshiy Gai village (Ivano-Frankovsk Region). They burnt a tent camp and fired guns into the ground near little children.

The authorities are encouraging nationalists. On May 28, red-and-black flags of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists – Ukrainian Insurgent Army were hoisted near administrative buildings in Lvov to mark Nationalist Day in line with a City Council resolution. The glorification of Nazism and rise in radical nationalism and extremism in Ukraine demand an urgent response from the international community. We are awaiting the SMM report on this topic.

Crime rates in the army are also on the rise. Ukraine's Military Prosecutor Anatoly Matisos announced at an international conference in Kharkov that 27,000 criminal cases had been opened against 43,000 Ukrainian service members since April 2014 (and this is just the tip of the iceberg, assuming that most crimes were hushed up and concealed by commanders). The current escalation in Donbass is apparently aimed at stopping the degradation of the Ukrainian army.

As regards dissatisfaction with Kiev's policy among certain segments of the population, the Ukrainian authorities explain it by invoking so-called hybrid warfare. That is precisely how the situation in the Kherson Region was described a few days ago by Ukrainian official Boris Babin, who spoke about "signs of the loss of state control" in border areas.

There are obvious signs of a growing internal political crisis in Ukraine. The deported ex-Governor of the Odessa Region Mikheil Saakashvili has urged the European Union to impose sanctions on President Poroshenko. The jailed ex-Hero of Ukraine Nadezhda Savchenko wrote on Facebook that she "got caught in the wheels of the political authoritarian machine in Ukraine." Even radicals who somehow fell out of favour are seeking help in Europe. On May 18, Sergei Melnichuk, the organiser of the Aidar punitive battalion and an independent MP, speaking at the Vienna Diplomatic Academy, said that he has fallen victim to a campaign waged by Mr Poroshenko and the oligarchs. As the Ukrainian elections are drawing nearer, divisions in society will only worsen.

All this directly affects the prospects of settling the internal political crisis in Ukraine. In order to resolve the problem, it is necessary to make Kiev drop its propaganda rhetoric and take real steps towards

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The only way to promote a settlement is through direct dialogue between Kiev and Donetsk and Lugansk and the consistent implementation of the Minsk Package of Measures. Attempts to distort and manipulate the clauses of this document, which was approved by the UN Security Council, are unacceptable. Efforts to delegitimise representatives of certain areas of the Donetsk and Lugansk regions of Ukraine, signatories to the Minsk Agreements, are equally counterproductive. Talk of replacing the functions of OSCE observers with the presence of armed peacekeepers is not in line with the goals of the settlement. Ideas of establishing a protectorate over Donbass by creating an international administration are unacceptable.

Thank you for your attention.