

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY
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OSCE region in light of developments with respect to Ukraine**

Distinguished colleagues,

We should like to join our colleagues in expressing our condolences to the family of Joseph Stone. His death is a heavy loss for his family and friends and a severe blow to the peacekeeping efforts of the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) and the OSCE. We hope that the truth in this case will be established soon and all those responsible will be held accountable.

The internal Ukrainian crisis that began more than three years ago was provoked by conflicts that had grown bigger over a long period of time in the European security system after the Cold War. The Ukrainian tragedy is the result of the West's attempts to retain its tottering global "leadership" and to dominate the post-Soviet geopolitical space, including through direct interference in the internal processes of the emergent States. The foreign-inspired coup d'état in Ukraine has split the nation and sucked the country into a vortex of permanent instability and fratricidal war. A serious hotspot of tension has emerged in Europe and buried the hopes for and dreams of a "common European house". Claims that this conflict was allegedly provoked by Russia are nothing more than cheap propaganda and an attempt to avoid responsibility for what has happened. We know very well now how it all began and how it evolved, who paid whom and how much, who formed battalions of fighters and, as they love to say now in Ukraine, who waged an all-out "hybrid war".

Nobody – neither Russia, nor Ukraine, nor the Europeans – needs this conflict, which has resulted in huge human and material losses. The only people interested in maintaining the crisis are those who are fostering instability in an attempt to attain their geopolitical goals – reinforcing their waning influence in Europe and building up their military presence, preserving NATO's decreasing relevance and, ultimately, unashamedly promoting their economic interests, including their energy interests – and, in passing, resolving their domestic political problems.

Despite the current Ukrainian leadership's anti-Russian hysteria and hostile steps aimed at severing all relations with Russia and eradicating the memory of our shared history, Ukraine remains a close neighbour with close family ties to Russia. For us, Ukraine is a country with which we continue to develop trade and from where millions of ordinary people come to earn a living in Russia. Russia feels the consequences of the internal Ukrainian crisis more than anyone else, not least because it has accepted over a million Ukrainian refugees, more than any other country. That is why we are interested in a rapid restoration of peace and tranquillity in Ukraine – and hence on our borders – and also the development of pragmatic and mutually beneficial co-operation between our countries.

Nevertheless, we have achieved the main goal in the two years since the signing of the Minsk Package of Measures, namely an end to the all-out war in Donbas. Permanent channels of communication between the parties have been established – the Minsk Trilateral Contact Group (TCG), through which constant dialogue is maintained between Donbas and the Ukrainian Government, even though it is not as productive as we would like. Intensive contacts are also maintained within the Normandy format at different levels.

While the armed clashes have not stopped, they are nevertheless localized. The line of contact has not shifted on the whole. Periods of aggravation alternate with relative calm, which, unfortunately, has not yet translated into a complete and sustainable ceasefire. In general, according to the SMM leaders, the parties are capable of observing a ceasefire. They can also withdraw heavy equipment and agree on areas for the disengagement of forces. The so-called bread truce – for the period of harvesting – was meant to enter into force on 24 June. It should be followed by a truce to coincide with the start of the school year. We hope that it will not suffer the same fate as the previous ceasefires.

There has been some progress in the exchange of prisoners. Some water supply facilities have been restored. We credit both the OSCE, in particular the SMM and its representatives in the TCG, and the Joint Centre for Control and Co-ordination for this.

At the same time, it has not yet been possible to achieve the disengagement of the parties' forces and hardware to the agreed safe distances, which is a key condition for a sustainable ceasefire. The number of casualties is growing on both sides, including among the civilian population. The main reason for this is the lack of trust between the parties. It can be restored only by political means, by granting Donbas political guarantees set out in the Constitution, the enactment of the laws on special status and amnesty, and the holding of local elections with monitoring by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. This is the essence of the Minsk Package of Measures.

We are convinced that the continuing tension at the line of contact is caused by the Ukrainian Government's unwillingness to look seriously for solutions in Minsk or to treat the Donbas representatives as fully fledged participants in the negotiations. The protracted impasse in the TCG Working Group on Political Issues and the demonstrative unwillingness of the Ukrainian negotiators to discuss key issues with the representatives of certain areas are the main obstacles to the entire settlement process.

Agreements were reached at the Normandy quartet summits in Paris and Berlin in 2015 and 2016 on the synchronization of political and military steps. This concept formed the basis of the future road map that should structure and work out the details of the process for the implementation of the Minsk agreements. Let me emphasize – work out the details of the

Minsk decisions and not dilute them or change their essence. The work on the road map within the Normandy format is progressing slowly, primarily because of Ukraine's attempts to revise the terms of the Minsk agreements. Yet this work continues despite all the difficulties.

The claims from time to time by the Ukrainian Government and from a number of other capitals about the alleged "inadequacy" of the Minsk agreements and the need to replace them with other formats do not help in the search for solutions. We are absolutely convinced that there is currently no alternative to the Minsk Package of Measures. Talk about their irrelevance and possible new settlement formats is harming the negotiation process by shifting attention from the substance of the talks to secondary issues.

In this context, we are carefully following the discussions in Ukraine on a new draft law on the "reintegration" of Donbas. We are concerned that the new law may be in conflict with the Minsk agreements and call into question the holding of local elections in Donbas and the prospects for the enactment of the laws on special status and amnesty. The fact that the discussion of the new initiative is taking place against a background of increasingly bellicose rhetoric and threats to resort to force and use the so-called "Yugoslav experience" is also worrying. If this happens, the prospects for a swift peace in the south-east will become remote for a long time to come.

Progress towards a settlement is hindered by the overall instability in Ukraine, the exploitation of the "Donbas issue" in domestic political infighting, the growing influence of radical and extremist forces and the authorities' open flirtation with them. Conflicts in society are being settled with increasing frequency by means of weapons in the hands of extremists, whose circulation in the country the authorities are unable to control. Furthermore, the authorities often play up to the radicals, evidently in the hope of seizing the initiative from them or winning their support. This is what happened in March 2017, for example, when President Poroshenko tightened and formalized the socio-economic and transport blockade of certain areas of Donbas, which pushed the region to the brink of a humanitarian disaster. In doing so, the Ukrainian Government has violated point 8 of the Minsk Package of Measures, which provides for "full resumption of socio-economic ties, including social transfers". The help promised by Germany and France in setting up mobile banking services for the population in the territories affected has failed to materialize.

The situation may be complicated even further by the approaching electoral cycle in Ukraine, especially in view of the economic difficulties facing the country's population. The Ukrainian Government's ill-considered and politically motivated actions are only compounding its economic problems. No one has damaged the Ukrainian economy more than the country's authorities, which have deprived the national budget of billions in tax revenue because of the aforementioned blockade, not to mention the severed co-operation ties with Russia, the efforts to squeeze out Russian business and the persecution of Ukrainian branches of Russian banks, which accounted for 15 per cent of Ukraine's banking sector in total. This cannot be called anything other than shooting oneself in the foot.

The path to peace lies in the swift implementation of the Minsk agreements in their entirety and in the established order. If the Ukrainian leadership has the appropriate political will and shows a real desire to establish peace in Donbas, especially if its Western friends provide an impetus for this, the implementation of Minsk-2 and ultimately the peaceful reintegration of the region would be easy.

I should like to express special thanks to the SMM leaders and monitors, who are working in difficult and dangerous conditions in Ukraine. We roundly condemn any intimidation and threats against the monitors regardless of where they come from or restrictions on their freedom of movement. At the same time, we have taken note of the fact that the SMM has reduced its patrolling of government-held areas after an SMM vehicle was damaged by an explosion because there are fewer paved roads there. In fact, there have long been whole areas that are completely off limits to the monitors.

We call on the SMM leaders and monitors to work more closely with the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk, not to manipulate reports and statistics and to adhere strictly to the high standards of objectivity and impartiality set out in their mandate.

Thank you for your attention.