



Security Council

Seventy-seventh year

8968th meeting

Thursday, 17 February 2022, 10 a.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mr. Vershinin (Russian Federation)

Members:

Albania	Mr. Hoxha
Brazil	Mr. De Almeida Filho
China	Mr. Zhang Jun
France	Mr. De Rivi�re
Gabon	Mr. Biang
Ghana	Mr. Agyeman
India	Mr. Tirumurti
Ireland	Ms. Byrne Nason
Kenya	Mr. Kimani
Mexico	Mr. De la Fuente Ram�rez
Norway	Ms. Heimerback
United Arab Emirates	Mrs. Nusseibeh
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Cleverly
United States of America	Mr. Blinken/Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield

Agenda

Letter dated 13 April 2014 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2014/264)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Letter dated 13 April 2014 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2014/264)

The President (*spoke in Russian*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Germany and Ukraine to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs; His Excellency Mr. Mikko Kinnunen, Special Representative of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine and in the Trilateral Contact Group; His Excellency Mr. Yaşar Halit Çevik, Chief Monitor of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine; and Ms. Tetiana Montian, Ukrainian civil-society activist.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Ms. DiCarlo.

Ms. DiCarlo: I last briefed the Council on the situation in Ukraine as it relates to the implementation of the Minsk agreements on 11 February 2021 (see S/2021/159).

At that time, I drew attention to the fragile security situation that prevailed despite the nominal ceasefire in place.

Today, a year after that briefing, tensions in and around Ukraine are running higher than at any point since 2014. Speculation and accusations around a potential military conflict are rife. Whatever one believes about the prospect of such a confrontation, the reality is that the current situation is extremely dangerous.

The issues underpinning the current crisis are complex and long-standing. They tie together the eight-year conflict in eastern Ukraine with the larger issues relating to the European security architecture.

Although seemingly intractable, given the stakes involved for our collective security and European stability, those issues can and must be solved through diplomacy and the full use of the many available regional and other mechanisms and frameworks. We support all such efforts, including through the Secretary-General's good offices.

Regrettably, there has been little, if any, meaningful progress in the implementation of the various provisions of the Minsk agreements. Despite repeated efforts, both the talks in the Normandy Four format and the discussions led by the Trilateral Contact Group remain deadlocked. We welcome the efforts by France and Germany to host the recent Normandy Four discussions to break the current impasse and hope that those will continue.

The Minsk agreements remain the only framework endorsed by the Council, in resolution 2202 (2015), for a negotiated, peaceful settlement of the conflict in eastern Ukraine. In that regard, we note with concern the reports of fresh ceasefire violations across the contact line over the past several hours. If verified, those violations must not be allowed to escalate further. We call on all sides to exercise maximum restraint at this time. We also call on all concerned to refrain from any unilateral measures that may go against the letter and spirit of the Minsk agreements or undermine their implementation and result in further tensions, including related to the status of certain areas of Luhansk and Donetsk.

We commend the important work of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The Council will hear shortly from Ambassador Mikko Kinnunen, Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine, and Ambassador Halit Çevik, Chief Monitor of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission. It is essential that we support their work, particularly at this critical time.

The Special Monitoring Mission, which carries out its crucial functions despite considerable challenges, must enjoy safe and secure conditions.

On 14 February, the Secretary-General expressed his deep worry regarding a potential military conflict in Europe. He reminded the international community that the price in human suffering, destruction and damage to European and global security is too high to contemplate.

The Secretary-General has remained fully engaged with key actors, including the Governments of the Russian Federation and Ukraine, and has reiterated the same unambiguous message: there is no alternative to diplomacy.

It is incumbent on all Member States to fully respect the key principles of the United Nations Charter, to settle disputes by peaceful means and to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State. In that regard, let me restate the commitment of the United Nations to the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders, as called for in General Assembly resolutions.

The recent diplomatic contacts, including between Heads of State, are welcome, but more urgently needs to be done, including tangible steps on the ground and an end to inflammatory rhetoric to defuse tensions.

As we have done throughout the eight years of the conflict, the United Nations continues to stand with the people of Ukraine. The United Nations country team in Ukraine remains fully operational. Our humanitarian colleagues are committed to providing assistance in accordance with the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality, humanity and independence. That includes, for example, three humanitarian convoys that have delivered more than 140 metric tons of life-saving assistance across the contact line since the start of 2022, benefiting thousands of people in need. It is imperative that safe and unimpeded access by humanitarian actors be respected by all sides, under any circumstances.

Amid the current tensions, we should not lose sight of the existing dire humanitarian needs impacting 2.9 million people, with the majority living in non-Government-controlled areas of eastern Ukraine. Donor support allowed us to provide aid to more than 1.5 million people during the first nine months of 2021 — the highest level since 2017. That critical achievement must be sustained amid the increasing severity of the humanitarian needs. Early and adequate funding of the \$190-million 2022 humanitarian response plan is needed to continue to meet the urgent needs of 1.8 million vulnerable people, including more than 1 million in Government-controlled areas and 750,000 in non-Government-controlled areas.

For the war-weary people of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, the impact of the coronavirus disease

(COVID-19), on top of the conflict, has caused even graver disruption and suffering. Millions of people who, prior to the pandemic, could still maintain family and community connectivity have been unable to travel freely across the contact line due to the COVID-19-related restrictions. As a consequence of their increased isolation and abrupt loss of access to basic services and livelihoods, the needs of that already vulnerable population have been exacerbated.

At the same time, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) continues to document civilian casualties and the impact of hostilities, monitor freedom of movement and receive and report on allegations of human rights violations. Despite the persistent tensions, last year saw the lowest number of civilian casualties documented by OHCHR since the beginning of the conflict. Overall adherence to the ceasefire has been an important factor in that trend. It must continue.

More than 14,000 people have already lost their lives in the conflict in eastern Ukraine. As the Secretary-General said this week, we simply cannot accept even the possibility of a new conflict in Ukraine. Indeed, we are facing a test. The world is looking to the collective security mechanisms in Europe, but also to the Security Council, to help ease tensions and ensure that the only skirmishes will be diplomatic. We cannot afford to fail.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Ms. DiCarlo for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Kinnunen.

Mr. Kinnunen: The Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) supports the implementation of the settlement provided by the Minsk agreements. However, in times such as these it is impossible to address the Donbas issue without paying attention to the bigger context, which is the tense security situation around Ukraine and in the region, as well as intensive, high-level diplomacy.

Arguably, that bigger context has a strong interlinkage with the work of the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG). That argument is based on views according to which finding a solution to the main task of the TCG, namely, the implementation of the Minsk agreements, could help in solving many of the issues of the bigger picture. However, currently, the positions of the participants to the discussions of the TCG are too far from each other. Consequently, as of now, it is not

yet possible to resolve the conflict related to eastern Ukraine within the TCG. We need to continue our work.

At the same time, it is important to note that all the elements of the three Minsk agreements are relevant and need to be addressed. Those agreements — the Minsk protocol, the Minsk memorandum and the Minsk package of measures — continue to form the basis of our work. It is crucial that all sides continue to remain committed.

It is popular to accuse one or another participant to the discussions of violating the Minsk agreements or not wanting to implement those agreements. In that regard, my message would suggest caution. The fact is that none of the elements of the Minsk agreements have been implemented or, at least, fully implemented. Furthermore, in my experience, it is not possible or appropriate to single out only one party for being responsible for that. Everyone involved in the discussions of the Trilateral Contact Group needs to bear their responsibility for carrying out what has been agreed. We need more flexible positions and readiness to compromise.

The security situation along the 480-kilometre contact line that separates the Government-controlled area from the non-Government-controlled area of eastern Ukraine is one of the key focuses of the work of the TCG. In the current situation, particularly with reference to the bigger context, it is important to continue to also stay calm along the contact line. Provocations are to be avoided. At the end of the day, no one would benefit from new military activities.

A concrete, fresh example of a potentially provocative situation is the alleged shelling that occurred this morning in Luhansk region, close to the contact line. It is important to try to establish the facts in a swift manner and avoid escalation. A participant to the discussions of the TCG has requested an extraordinary meeting of the TCG.

The armed conflict related to eastern Ukraine is eight years old, as we heard from the Under-Secretary-General. The continuing conflict has resulted in more than 14,000 victims and hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons and refugees. Civilian crossings of the contact line have dropped by 95 per cent since the closing of checkpoints two years ago, resulting in additional civilian suffering and hardship. Conflict-affected areas with ongoing military activity

have sadly become part of everyday life for countless Ukrainian citizens.

In late December 2021, two months ago, participants in the discussions of the Trilateral Contact Group fully agreed to adhere to the ceasefire agreement of July 2020. This New Year's commitment two months ago did not hold up well enough. However, on the positive side, for a one-month period following the commitment, there were 70 per cent fewer ceasefire violations than there had been the month before. This once again indicates that if there is political will, it is possible not to use arms and possible not to fire.

Secondly, there have been small positive steps with our work, such as the creation of an environmental expert group. A recent visit by the International Atomic Energy Agency to the non-Government controlled area shows that when there is a will on all sides, agreeing is possible. But clearly not enough progress has been made. One reason for this is State-related issues, which may from the outside appear procedural, but are actually part of the core substance.

During this week, the State Duma of the Russian Federation approved a resolution calling upon the Russian President to recognize the independence of certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. This has raised questions and internal discussion within the TCG. While I note that the Duma resolution does not reflect the official line of the Government, it is important to emphasize that all participants need to remain committed to the goal of restoring Ukraine's sovereignty over the totality of its territory.

At the same time, the bigger picture — the unprecedented international focus on Ukraine and the region — should be used as an opportunity to unblock the work of the TCG. I am grateful for the recent high-level contacts between the leaders of the Normandy Four, as well as the two meetings of the Normandy Four political advisers and, for example, the discussions of the Chairman-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Kyiv and Moscow during the past days. These all could give new impetus to unblocking the TCG's work. They could, for example, give us an opportunity to have substantial discussions on certain concrete draft laws at the very heart of the Minsk agreements.

Finally, the TCG has now met in video format in online meetings for almost two years. Meetings in video format lack drive and confidentiality. For several

reasons, they do not offer possibilities for genuine negotiations and interaction. My goal remains to return to the face-to-face meetings of our unique platform, which brings together Ukraine, Russia and the OSCE, as well as representatives of certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

Mr. President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Mr. Kinnunen for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Çevik.

Mr. Çevik: I would like to thank Council members for the opportunity to brief the Security Council today. In my capacity as Chief Monitor of the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and as the Coordinator of the working group on security issues in the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG), I will update Council members on key developments on the situation in eastern Ukraine during the past year. These include the security situation along the contact line, the impact of nearly eight years of the conflict on civilians and the SMM's increasingly challenging operational environment.

The security situation remains fraught with tension. The gradual fraying of the ceasefire, which I described to the Council last February (see S/2021/159, annex III), has regrettably accelerated, and inevitably civilians on both sides of the contact line continue to bear the burden of the tensions and resulting insecurities.

I further have to acknowledge with deep concern that the impediments to the SMMs mandated freedom of movement have not only persisted, but also escalated in the past year. In times of heightened tensions in and around Ukraine, when the Mission's impartial and objective reporting is vital, these restrictions are especially unacceptable, since they limit the Mission's capabilities.

The SMM has been vilified in public rhetoric and Mission members have at times been intimidated. Our technical monitoring tools are subjected to intense interference daily. The Mission suffered temporary blockades of operations in the Donetsk region last October. In Luhansk region, the SMM is also subjected to a blockade. The SMM's sustainability is at risk, as it has been deprived of its operational freedom and independence.

In this context, I also wish to highlight my concern over the fact that the contact line remains exceedingly

difficult to cross, both for SMM members and civilians. It increasingly looks like and feels like a border that transects and divides families and communities and provisional services.

Before elaborating on these developments, I wish to stress that in such challenging circumstances, the political will of the sides to strictly adhere to the ceasefire and reduce tensions is imperative. Silence along the contact line is of utmost importance for allowing space for negotiations; abstaining from inflammatory public rhetoric is also essential.

Since I last briefed the Security Council, the overall security situation along the contact line in eastern Ukraine has remained volatile. After the unprecedented period of relative calm that followed the 22 July 2020 The agreement on measures to strengthen the ceasefire, throughout 2021 we saw a gradual but sustained increase in the level of armed violence. In 2021, between August and December in particular, the Mission recorded a high number of ceasefire violations, including the increased use of heavy weapons that the sides had committed to withdraw, as well as their consequences in civilian casualties and damage to infrastructure.

In November, the SMM reported levels of kinetic activity, including more destructive weapons, worryingly close to those recorded prior to the 22 July measures agreement. At the 22 December 2021 TCG meeting, the participants expressed a strong determination to uphold the ceasefire regime. The first month following that meeting saw a considerable decrease — by some 60 per cent — in the level of violence, but tensions nevertheless remain high, fuelled also by the wider discussions surrounding the security situation in and around Ukraine.

Of serious concern is the fact that, in 2021, the SMM reported ceasefire violations in and near the three symbolically important pilot disengagement areas, including with the use of proscribed weapons. The Luhansk region, in particular the wider parametres of the Zolote area, consistently remain a hotspot. On 3 December, the SMM recorded a violent exchange of fire inside and near the Stanytsia Luhanska disengagement and crossing point. This was an especially dangerous situation, as civilians in transit, including children, were put at risk. This was the first time since April 2020 that SMM reported ceasefire violations inside this area. Importantly, the benefits of disengagement have been clearly demonstrated — as it

allowed for the reconstruction of the Stanytsia Luhanska bridge, one of the symbols of discord — by underlining the significance of violence in those three areas and providing insight into the sides' willingness or, at times, unwillingness, to adhere to their commitments.

In that context, I also wish to share my deep concern about the sides' holding of live-fire exercises inside the security zone throughout 2021 and since the start of 2022. Those ceasefire violations deserve our particular attention, as they violate both the comprehensive ceasefire regime and the specific decision of 3 March 2016, prohibiting the conduct of such exercises. Last month, they made up approximately 10 per cent of all ceasefire violations recorded by the SMM.

Since the beginning of 2022, the Mission has already been recording, on average, twice as many ceasefire violations per day as it did over the same period in 2021, when the sides' adherence to the ceasefire had already started fraying. As I noted, the increasing levels of violence, with the use of heavy weapons, inevitably led to an increase in the number of corroborated civilian casualties, due to shelling and small arms fire.

In 2021, the SMM corroborated more civilian casualties due to shelling and small arms fire — 48 casualties — than those caused by mines and other explosive objects. Nearly 60 per cent of the corroborated civilian casualties were as a result of shelling and small arms fire. In addition, nearly 70 per cent of all cases of damage to civilian objects and infrastructure sites were recorded between October and November of last year.

Other violations of commitments undertaken by the sides have also continued. The SMM recorded new trench extensions and improvements to positions, the presence of heavy weapons, military and military-type positions in residential areas and the increased use of non-SMM unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). As the last point on this issue, it is worth mentioning that violations occur on both sides of the contact line.

Regrettably, discussions in the Working Group on Security Issues have been at an impasse for the past year. Agreements in principle reached in 2020 on 19 demining areas, an updated mine action plan and four new disengagement areas that has been drafted and verified, as well as on some aspects of the framework decision on disengagement, have not been actioned. The security-related conclusions of the 2019 Normandy

Four Paris summit require new political impetus to be translated into tangible progress.

Since April 2021, participants have discussed a draft addendum to the measures to strengthen the ceasefire agreement of 22 July 2020, but common ground has yet to be found. As I underlined last year, such a mechanism would facilitate de-escalation, address the persistent issue of impunity and contribute to building confidence on the ground. It would demonstrate the sides' political will to act in line with their commitments.

I wish to underline the fact that the communities along the contact line are deeply traumatized by living in constant danger and uncertainty. I already mentioned the 48 casualties caused by small arms fire or shelling. In 2021, the SMM corroborated another 43 cases of people injured or killed by mines, unexploded ordnance and other explosive devices. It is imperative that the sides do their utmost to mitigate those constant threats, even unilaterally, in parallel with the negotiation of overall solutions.

The challenges posed by the ongoing pandemic have also endured and continue to make daily life even more challenging for civilians on both sides of the contact line. The past year saw no improvement in the freedom of movement of civilians between the Government- and non-Government-controlled areas of Ukraine. Crossing the contact line remains limited to two of the five existing crossing points. Only the pedestrian crossing at the Stanytsia Luhanska bridge is accessible on a daily basis. There has been no progress in the opening of the two new crossings at Zolote and Shchastya, although the agreement to open them opening was reached in July 2020.

Although some of the pandemic-related restrictions were eased last year, official data show that crossings in 2021 remain at a mere 5 per cent of pre-pandemic levels. Those are not just statistics. They represent the elderly, who can no longer access their pensions, as well as young people who are losing out on educational and economic opportunities. Access to other services, including health care and documentation such as passports, birth and death certificates is being seriously affected, while people — family, friends and communities — are being separated from each other. Estrangement between communities spanning the contact line should not become entrenched. The needs and rights of civilians should take precedence. All existing and new crossing points should be fully

open and all restrictions on both sides of the contact line should be lifted without delay.

In those challenging circumstances, it is also vital that critical infrastructure on which civilians depend for their basic needs remain operational and protected from armed violence. Last year, the SMM continued facilitating and monitoring repairs to gas, water and electricity infrastructure objects, thereby benefiting millions of civilians on both sides of the contact line. Regrettably, since February 2021, and especially in the wake of an incident inside the disengagement area near Zolote in October, the process of exchanging security guarantees between the sides has been at an impasse, particularly in the Luhansk region. I would like to underline that the exchange of security guarantees, which are essential for conducting vital repairs, has not been linked previously to increased tensions on the ground. That process should not be politicized, as is being done now.

In reviewing those challenges, it appears to me that never before has there been a greater need for impartial and objective monitoring delivered by the SMM. The sides also recognize the importance of the Mission's work. Their reaction to the temporary relocation of some Mission members last weekend was a clear indication. Throughout the past year, the SMM has continued managing the challenges I described and performing its mandated tasks. However, since I last briefed the Council (see S/PV.8726), the Mission's work has continued to be undermined by persistent and escalating constraints on its freedom of movement, predominantly in areas outside of Government control. I need to underline that freedom of movement is what allows monitoring to take place, as foreseen in the mandate. It is essential for enabling the SMM to serve as impartial eyes and ears of the international community in Ukraine. I wish to recall that that freedom of movement is enshrined in the Mission's mandate as well as in the Minsk agreements.

In 2021, some 91 per cent of all freedom of movement restrictions experienced by the SMM took place in non-Government-controlled areas. The past year saw the Mission's movement across the contact line increasingly denied and delayed or allowed with conditions. Those impediments continued to undermine the SMM's operational unity and threaten the sustainability of its work in non-Government-controlled areas. Impediments to the SMM's use of technical monitoring tools have also continued on both

sides of the contact line. Instances of gunfire and the targeting of the SMM's unmanned aerial vehicles have almost doubled. The intensity of GPS signal interference in 2021 reached unusually high levels. The degradation of our aerial environment in 2021 particularly affected the SMM's long-range UAVs. That platform is the only one that can monitor the full length of the contact line and areas near the border outside of Government control on a 24/7 basis. However, more than 80 per cent of the flights encountered interference.

The past year has been difficult on many levels. At a time of heightened tensions on the ground and in public rhetoric, it is imperative for the signatories to the Minsk agreements to adhere to all their commitments. The first and foremost among them is strict adherence to the ceasefire regime. The political impasse and increased violence reinforce one another. I hope that the recent resumption of the Normandy Four consultations and other confidence-building efforts under the auspices of the OSCE will provide much-needed political impetus to relieve tensions in the region and for the conflict-resolution process to move forward. Meanwhile, the restoration of the SMM's freedom of movement is paramount so that the Mission can do its job. The SMM should be actively supported by sides in installing new cameras and opening long-planned forward patrol bases. The SMM should once again be able to cross the contact line without arbitrary conditions or denials. Its unimpeded and unconditional access through the contact line, especially in the Luhansk region, must be restored without delay.

Attempts to redefine the Mission by accusing it of bias should also come to an end. The impasse in the exchange of security guarantees among the sides also requires an urgent resolution to daily crossings of the contact line. The capacity on the ground exists. The will to use it needs to be strengthened. This needs to be resolved for the sake of the needs of the long-suffering civilians. The SMM remains available to facilitate constructive efforts in that regard.

Before concluding my remarks, I would like to highlight two points.

I remain convinced that the SMM's role remains critical to the reducing tensions and supporting peace, stability and security. Yet our key challenge has been to ensure the space for the implementation of that mandate. Lacking any way to enforce its implementation, we need the strong and sustained support of the

international community to urge the sides to implement their commitments and restore the SMM's freedom of movement. Where there is political will, there is a way. I particularly remember the reconstruction of the Stanytsia Luhanska bridge after so many years and the encouraging periods of quiet that briefly followed the 22 July 2020 package of measures agreement. Progress is possible.

I am also compelled to highlight the continuing plight of civilians. I earlier described the death and injury caused by continued exchanges of fire and by mines. Furthermore, allow me to also note that the contact line has been nearly completely sealed off for two years. People-to-people contacts have been greatly disrupted, and communities and families have been divided, owing to no fault of their own. That is taking place against the background of other developments that are further deepening the divide between people living on both sides of the contact line. The political challenges of the eight-year conflict should not eclipse the human costs. I implore the signatories to the Minsk agreements to be mindful of those costs and redouble their efforts. I also urge the members of the Council to work with the sides and support their efforts to that end.

I should also like to provide some information on this morning's developments. For the period from yesterday evening to 11.20 a.m. today, Kyiv time, the SMM recorded 500 explosions along the contact line. The vital disengagement areas near Stanytsia Luhanska and Zolote were particularly impacted. Since 11.20 a.m., we have recorded approximately 30 explosions. Tensions, therefore, seem to be easing. Around noon, the SMM asked the sides to strictly adhere to their ceasefire commitments. It is critically important to de-escalate immediately to avoid further aggravation of the situation.

The SMM is aware of, and following up on, the reports of civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure along the contact line during the past 24 hours. We will continue to follow up the security situation to the extent that our resources allow. The increase in kinetic activity occurred along approximately 200 kilometres of the contact line, primarily in Luhansk oblast. Many SMM patrols are continuing to return and are in the process of reporting.

SMM patrols have visited the sites of the alleged damage to a kindergarten and a railroad station in the Government-controlled part of Stanytsia Luhanska.

At the kindergarten, the SMM saw fresh damage to its facade. Of course, details will be reported after all corroboration efforts have been completed. We will do that as soon as possible, as we are aware of the importance of the reports in reducing the tensions in the area. In Marinka and Kremenchuk, where there were allegations, the SMM itself did not register ceasefire violations. We will continue to follow up the allegations that have reached us, but it is important to tell the sides to reduce tensions and cease fire and be mindful of the high level of tensions in the region.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Mr. Çevik for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Montian.

Ms. Montian (*spoke in Russian*): I listened very carefully to everything that the briefers who spoke before me said. I would like to say to the members of the Security Council that I am completely certain that they know very well that the authorities in Kyiv absolutely never had the intention of implementing the first package of the Minsk agreement and, to an even lesser degree, the subsequent Minsk package of measures agreement. This simply gives pause to say that, yes, we will implement that; in the meantime, the West will provide us with weapons and strengthen our armed forces; and we hope that at some point in the future we will be able to recover the rebellious republics by force. \

As Zelenskyy said only recently, they do not only not want to talk to the republics. He said that he sees no reason to have dialogue with Donetsk or Luhansk. They do not wish to have conversations with civil society even within Ukraine. People who do not want to go to Europe or join NATO, who are against the coup d'état and who want to live in peace and friendship in Russia and other countries — not only are those people not politically represented within Ukrainian politics, but they are also being criminally prosecuted. I am a criminal lawyer. All Ruslan Kotsaba did was post a video on YouTube saying that he was in favour of peace and against war in Donbas. He has been on trial since 2015, accused of high treason. When I went to Donbas personally to meet one of the field commanders, the late Alexei Mozgovoi, in order to pick up a detainee, a soldier from the Ukrainian armed forces, my name was listed on the "Peacemaker" website, along with the names of a huge number of people guilty of opposing

the Maidan, opposing a coup d'état or opposing NATO and Europe.

Am I really meant to believe that those people who prosecute ordinary people because they liked something on social media, for example, the State Emblem of the Soviet Union, which is one of the recent cases — people who cut off all opposition channels and are persecuting all opposition politics — are the same people who will engage in negotiations with Donetsk and Luhansk? It is very clear that, in principle, that is impossible. It is like matter and anti-matter: they annihilate one other.

Where was the difficulty in providing special status in the past five years? They are not going to provide it because any form of dissent in Ukraine is being quashed. Those in Ukraine who oppose the Maidan, a coup d'état or war itself are considered enemies of the people. They have no right to take the floor and make their voices heard anywhere at all. They have no political parties; they have no civil society associations. They are deprived of the right to vote in their own country. They do not have that right at all. In the light of that, how can one expect that Kyiv will negotiate with Luhansk and Donetsk? I am sure that Council members understand that that will never, ever happen.

One of the previous speakers said that, allegedly, despite the efforts of Germany and France, the Kyiv regime does not want to comply with the Minsk agreements. I am convinced that the West is allowing the Kyiv regime to get away with non-compliance. If that were not the case, all of the Minsk agreements would have been implemented a long time ago. There is no use in stating that Kyiv is an independent entity or that Ukraine is independent. It is a colony of a collective West where everything is decided by external parties who staged the Maidan and the coup d'état, plunging my country into slavery.

Those same people are obstructing the implementation of the Minsk agreements and will continue to do so. I am certain of it because the West's real goal, despite all the peace-loving speeches I have heard, including in this Chamber, is to turn Kyiv against the republics and drag Russia into this war. There is absolutely no explanation for the Western hysteria about Russia being about to invade — I heard President Biden say that just now, while we have been having this meeting. The West's one and only goal is to incite war. If that were not the case, then the puppet Government

of Ukraine would have been compelled to implement the Minsk agreements a long time ago.

Since that has not happened, there is one explanation to make clear: the West wants a war with Russia, and it wants that war to take place on Ukraine's territory. It is being used as a chessboard, and the people of Ukraine and those of the unrecognized republics are being used as pawns in geopolitical games. There is nothing else that can be said here, and I am sure that Council members themselves are well aware of that. I am glad that I had the opportunity to say that to members' faces. And I believe that they are allowing this war to happen. The events that occurred today in the republics — shelling along the entire contact line — ultimately convinced me in that regard.

For almost eight years now, the Kyiv regime has been shelling 100,000 people using heavy artillery. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe has so-called observers, but the people in the territories call them "blind observers" because they seem to be blind to that fact and have not reacted at all.

Meanwhile, on the territory controlled by Kyiv, not a single child has been killed, and buildings are still standing. That happens only in the unrecognized republics. I have visited them personally. I am describing it first-hand, because I travelled down the entire contact line and I saw how peaceful civilians — unprotected, vulnerable people — are being killed. The people who did not manage to leave are largely the elderly, women with children and persons with disabilities. Those who could leave left the area a long time ago. Those long-suffering people — 100,000 of them — are hostages there.

The whole of Europe is, for the eighth consecutive year, duplicitously and bloodthirstily watching the suffering of those people while claiming that there is no alternative to the Minsk agreements. Fine — in that case, either compel the puppets from the Kyiv regime to implement them or stop saying that there is no alternative to them.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Ms. Montian for her briefing.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.

We would like to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs,

Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo; the Special Representative of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine and in the Trilateral Contact Group, Mr. Mikko Kinnunen; and the Chief Monitor of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, Mr. Yaşar Halit Çevik, for their assessments and views. We are grateful to Ms. Tetiana Montian for her valuable first-hand information on how the decisions of the Security Council on the settlement of the intra-Ukrainian conflict are being implemented in practice.

The date of today's meeting was not chosen at random. On this day seven years ago, the Security Council, through its resolution 2202 (2015), unanimously adopted the package of measures for the implementation of the Minsk agreements as the only international legal basis for resolving the civil conflict in the east of Ukraine (see S/PV.7384). That is why we consider the main goal of today's meeting to be the Security Council's reaffirmation of the fact that there is no alternative to that momentous document for Ukraine.

Unfortunately, after seven years, we have more and more reasons to believe that the implementation of the Minsk agreements still does not feature in the plans of our Ukrainian neighbours. They are already talking about that openly. Here are just a few of the most recent examples.

Just yesterday, the Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine, Ms. Iryna Vreshchuk, stated that "there would be no new laws on the special status of Donbas and no direct coordination". That came after Zelenskyy's meeting with Chancellor Scholz. She also acknowledged the fact that Kyiv does not feel any pressure from the West to implement the Minsk agreements.

On 4 February, in an interview with the Ukrainian television channel 1+1, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Mr. Dmytro Kuleba, said that the Minsk agreements could not be implemented on Russian terms, to which he for some reason ascribed the direct dialogue between Ukraine and Donbas, despite the fact that it is clearly stated as one of the conditions in the package of measures. The same idea was put forward by the Head of the Presidential Administration of Ukraine, Mr. Andriy Yermak, at the recent Normandy format meeting of political advisers in Paris.

Earlier, on 2 February, Mr. Kuleba said that no Ukrainian region will have the right to veto State decisions, and that that was set in stone. He said that

there would be no special status, as Russia supposedly imagines, and no veto power. A day earlier, on 1 February, President Zelenskyy also reminded the entire world of Ukraine's inability to negotiate. Hinting at the existence of an alternative solution to the conflict in Donbas, he said that Kyiv has varying views on the order of implementation of certain provisions of the Minsk agreements.

On 31 January, in an interview with the Associated Press, the Secretary of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine, Mr. Danilov, stated that the implementation of the Minsk agreements meant the destruction of the country. He said that the agreements were signed at the barrel of Russian guns, with the Germans and the French looking on, and that every rational person understood that implementation was impossible.

Ukrainian politics are trying to implant the opinion in the West that the Minsk agreements go against the national interests of Ukraine. But if the goal of building peace on its own territory is in the national interest of Ukraine, such statements are out of place.

Another excuse that we hear here is that Russia is not implementing some of its obligations under the Minsk agreements; it is very possible that we will also hear this today. At the same time, it is obvious that there are absolutely no grounds for that, because there is no mention of Russia in the text of the agreements. Let me just offer one opinion on this issue — not that of just anyone but that of a judge of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine, Mr. Shishkin. He very recently proposed undertaking criminal prosecutions against those who participated in the elaboration of the agreements, Leonid Kuchma and Petro Poroshenko, and the reason, he says, is that:

"Minsk provides for 20 obligations placed on Ukraine, six on the OSCE, two on Donbas and not a single one on Russia".

Allow me to once again very briefly recall the contents of the document that we are discussing at this meeting. Let me list them item by item. The order in which they are to be implemented is very clearly stated and cannot be changed.

First, a ceasefire; second, the withdrawal of weapons; third, OSCE monitoring; fourth, the launching of a dialogue between Kyiv and Donbas; fifth, amnesty; sixth, the exchange of detainees;

seventh, humanitarian access; eighth, the lifting of the economic blockade; ninth, the transfer to Kyiv of border control, provided item 11 is implemented; tenth, the withdrawal of foreign formations and mercenaries; eleventh, new constitutions providing special status for Donbas; twelfth, an agreement on the order of the elections; and thirteenth, intensifying the work of the Minsk Contact Group.

Seven years down the road, it is clear that none of the provisions of the package of measures has been implemented by Ukraine in full, starting with the first one, a ceasefire. The root of the problem here is a systematic lack of will on the part of Kyiv to initiate a direct dialogue with the authorized representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk in the Contact Group. However, that is a dialogue that is clearly directly provided for in the fourth, ninth, eleventh and twelfth items of the document. That is not our requirement; that is something that is stated in the document. It is an obligation on Ukraine and something that our neighbours increasingly bring into question, thus risking the undermining of the entire Minsk process, which could lead to devastating consequences for Ukraine.

Ukraine stubbornly refuses to implement the provisions of the Minsk agreements on direct dialogue with Donbas, interim self-governance, restoring socioeconomic links and constitutional reform to grant special status to the region. Currently the Verkhovna Rada has a draft on decentralization; it is not agreed with Donbas and does not provide for special status.

The Ukrainian side has completely moved away from a direct interaction with Donbas within the coordination mechanism. It is providing various options but does not allow for an effective reaction in case of violations of the ceasefire regime. Attempts to place the blame on Russia and to imply that it is a party to the conflict are futile and baseless.

I must say that we are very disappointed by the ostrich-like position of our Western colleagues, who are trying hard not to see obvious things. We are surprised that they are sidelining the Minsk measures but are placing emphasis on the Normandy format. I should like to recall that the Normandy format, according to annex II to resolution 2202 (2015), is a mechanism to oversee implementation but not a forum where new decisions can be discussed. For seven years Russia has been calling from all platforms for Western sponsors

to exert pressure on Kyiv to implement the Minsk agreements; they have been doing exactly the opposite.

So the increasing feeling of impunity and permissiveness pushed Ukrainian hotheads to use new excuses and undertake military adventures against their own people, and the internal armed conflict has resulted in thousands of victims. Many millions of people in Donbas are still viewed as foreigners in their own country. Automatic rifles, sniper rifles, Howitzers and strike drones are aimed at them. Ukrainian representatives continue to come up with new excuses not to implement the agreements and to give orders to shell their own people.

The Alley of Angels, a memorial complex in Donetsk, commemorates the children who died at the hands of the Ukrainian military, including those who died at the children's beach in Zugres, a town in Donbas, on 13 August 2014, targeted by the Ukrainian air force. More than twenty people died and dozens were wounded. A 24-year-old local, Anastasia Ruban, was there with her two-year-old son when the Ukrainian air force started shelling the town from its multiple rocket-launch systems. One of the charges exploded right next to them. "Everything was covered in blood and smoke, and the bloodied bodies of children were everywhere," says the woman. That and other similar episodes were gathered by the investigative committee of Russia and the RT network in a compilation showing the crimes committed by the Ukrainian military using prohibited means and methods of warfare. Our United Nations Mission has disseminated it to members of the Security Council. I would ask them to please take a look; they will be horrified.

Kyiv's commitment to the complex of measures can also be illustrated by the abduction last year of Andrey Kosyak, an observer from Luhansk, from the Joint Centre for Control and Coordination. We would be very grateful if Mr. Kinnunen could tell us about that episode. We know it was a treacherous event and a direct violation of the fifth item under the measures, which prohibits

"the prosecution and punishment of persons in connection with events that took place in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine".

Finally, let me say that I hope that my colleagues from the Western countries will be able to resist the temptation to play to the cameras, to make this meeting

into a forum for baseless and aggressive rhetoric and to present their groundless accusations that Russia allegedly was going to attack Ukraine. I think that we have had enough speculation on that, including in the meeting of the Security Council held on 31 January convened by the United States (see S/PV.8960).

We long ago clarified and explained everything, and the date announced for the so-called invasion is behind us, so therefore my advice to my colleagues is not to put yourself in an awkward situation.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I now call on the Secretary of State of the United States of America.

Mr. Blinken (United States of America): The Security Council is convened today to discuss the implementation of the Minsk agreements, a goal that we all share despite Russia's persistent violations. Those agreements, which were negotiated in 2014 and 2015 and signed by Russia, remain the basis for the peace process to resolve the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

The Council's primary responsibility, the very reason for its creation, is the preservation of peace and security. As we meet today, the most immediate threat to peace and security is Russia's looming aggression against Ukraine. The stakes go far beyond Ukraine. This is a moment of peril for the lives and safety of millions of people as well as for the foundation of the United Nations Charter and the rules-based international order that preserves stability worldwide.

This crisis directly affects every member of the Council and every country in the world, because the basic principles that sustain peace and security, principles that were enshrined in the wake of two World Wars and a cold war, are under threat: the principle that one country cannot change the borders of another by force; the principle that one country cannot dictate another's choices or policies or with whom it will associate; and the principle of national sovereignty.

This is the exact kind of crisis that the United Nations, specifically the Security Council, was created to prevent. We must address what Russia is doing right now to Ukraine.

Over the past months, without provocation or justification, Russia has amassed more than 150,000 troops around Ukraine's borders and in Russia, Belarus

and occupied Crimea. Russia says that it is drawing down those forces. We do not see that happening on the ground. Our information clearly indicates that those forces, including ground troops, aircraft and ships, are preparing to launch an attack against Ukraine in the coming days.

We do not know precisely how things will play out, but here is what the world can expect to see unfold. In fact, it is unfolding right now, today, as Russia takes steps down the path to war and reissued the threat of military action.

First, Russia plans to manufacture a pretext for its attack. That could be a violent event that Russia will blame on Ukraine or an outrageous accusation that Russia will level against the Ukrainian Government. We do not know exactly the form that it will take. It could be a fabricated so-called terrorist bombing inside Russia, the invented discovery of a mass grave, a staged drone strike against civilians or a fake, even a real, attack using chemical weapons. Russia may describe such an event as ethnic cleansing or a genocide, making a mockery of a concept that we in this Chamber do not take lightly, nor do I take lightly based on my family history.

In the past few days, Russian media have already begun to spread some of those false alarms and claims, maximize public outrage and lay the groundwork for an invented justification for war. Today that drumbeat has only intensified in Russia's State-controlled media. We have heard some of those basic allegations from Russian-backed speakers here today.

Secondly, in response to that manufactured provocation, the highest levels of the Russian Government may theatrically convene emergency meetings to address the so-called crisis. The Government will issue proclamations declaring that Russia must respond to defend Russian citizens or ethnic Russians in Ukraine. Next, the attack is planned to begin. Russian missiles and bombs will drop across Ukraine. Communications will be jammed. Cyberattacks will shut down key Ukrainian institutions. After that, Russian tanks and soldiers will advance on key targets that have already been identified and mapped out in detailed plans. We believe that such targets include Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, a city of 2.8 million people.

Conventional attacks are not all that Russia plans to inflict upon the people of Ukraine. We have information that indicates that Russia will target specific groups

of Ukrainians. We have been warning the Ukrainian Government of all that is coming. Here today we are laying it out in great detail with the hope that, by sharing what we know with the world, we can influence Russia to abandon the path of war and choose a different path while there is still time.

I am mindful that some have called into question our information, recalling previous instances where intelligence ultimately did not bear out. But let me be clear: I am here today not to start a war but to prevent one. The information that I presented here is validated by what we have seen unfolding in plain sight before our eyes for months. One should remember that, while Russia has repeatedly derided our warnings and alarms as melodrama and nonsense, it has been steadily amassing more than 150,000 troops on Ukraine's borders, as well as the capabilities to conduct a massive military assault.

It is not just we who are seeing that. Allies and partners see the same thing. Russia has been hearing not only from us. The international chorus has grown louder and louder.

If Russia does not invade Ukraine, we will be relieved that Russia changed course and proved our predictions wrong. That would be a far better outcome than the course that we are currently on. We will gladly accept any criticism that anyone directs at us.

As President Biden said, this would be a war of choice. If Russia makes that choice, we have been clear, along with allies and partners, that our response will be sharp and decisive. President Biden reiterated that forcefully earlier this week.

There is another choice that Russia can still make if there is any truth to its claim that it is committed to diplomacy. Diplomacy is the only responsible way to resolve this crisis. An essential part of that is through the implementation of the Minsk agreements — the subject of our meeting today. There are a series of commitments that Russia and Ukraine made under the Minsk agreements, with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Normandy format partners involved as well. If Russia is prepared to sit with the Ukrainian Government and work through the process of implementing those commitments, our friends in France and Germany stand ready to convene senior-level discussions in the Normandy format to settle these issues. Ukraine is ready for that, and we stand fully ready to support the parties.

Progress towards resolving the Donbas crisis through the Minsk agreements can reinforce the broader discussions on security issues in which we are prepared to engage with Russia, in coordination with our allies and partners. More than three weeks ago, we provided Russia with a paper that detailed concrete reciprocal steps that we can take in the near term to address our respective concerns and advance the collective security interests of Russia, the United States and our European partners and allies. This morning we received a response, which we are evaluating.

Earlier today I sent a letter to Russia's Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, proposing that we meet in Europe next week, following on our talks in recent weeks, to discuss the steps that we can take to resolve this crisis without conflict. We are also proposing meetings of the NATO-Russia Council and the OSCE Permanent Council. Those meetings can pave the way for a summit of key leaders, in the context of de-escalation, to reach understandings on our mutual security concerns. As lead diplomats for our nations, we have a responsibility to make every effort for diplomacy to succeed and to leave no diplomatic stone unturned. If Russia is committed to diplomacy, we are presenting every opportunity for it to demonstrate that commitment.

I have no doubt that the response to my remarks here today will be more dismissals from the Russian Government about the United States stoking hysteria or that it has no plans to invade Ukraine. Let me make this simple. The Russian Government can announce today, with no qualification, equivocation or deflection, that Russia will not invade Ukraine. Russia should state that clearly and plainly to the world and should then demonstrate it by sending its troops, tanks and planes back to their barracks and hangers and its diplomats to the negotiating table. In the coming days, the world will remember that commitment or the refusal to make it.

Mr. Cleverly (United Kingdom): I thank the briefers for the information that they have provided today. The United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the mandate of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine continue to command our full support. The rights of all Ukrainians, whether they are in Kyiv, Lviv, Donetsk or Luhansk, can be served only by peace, diplomacy and dialogue.

I want to make absolutely clear the United Kingdom's support for the implementation of the Minsk agreements, as endorsed by resolution 2202 (2015). That resolution reaffirmed the Security Council's full respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine. It remains the responsibility of all parties to implement fully their commitments and seek a peaceful resolution of the conflict. In that respect, we condemn the actions taken by the Russian Duma to propose that the Russian President recognize the regions of Luhansk and Donetsk as independent. That would directly undermine the Minsk agreements and must be rejected by the Russian authorities, in line with the commitments that they have made. We welcome all efforts to support the process and avoid escalation, including the role of the OSCE and the Normandy format. This remains our long-standing position.

Let us remind ourselves of the context for the Minsk agreements and the situation in which Ukraine finds itself today.

In March 2014, Russia invaded and illegally annexed Crimea, in flagrant violation of international law. A few weeks later, in April, Russia instigated a conflict in Donbas, which it continues to fuel today. More than 14,000 people have lost their lives in the fighting.

Now, today, the Ukrainian people are yet again living under the threat of invasion, with well over 130,000 Russian troops, heavy weaponry and military vessels amassed and exercising on their northern, eastern and southern borders, from Belarus to the Black Sea.

Let us say clearly what the whole world can see: Russia has deployed the forces necessary to invade Ukraine, and now has them readied for action.

In the past days we have heard Russian claims that some units are returning to barracks. It is, however, all too clear that the opposite is in fact true, and the Russian military build-up continues.

Russia will say that it has the right to move its forces within its own territory, but no one has the right to threaten the use of force. Russia is patently failing to live up to the international commitments that it has made around military transparency, by refusing to adequately explain its military build-up or provide the necessary transparency to build trust and de-escalate the situation.

If the Kremlin is serious about a diplomatic resolution, then it needs to show up to the diplomatic meetings and commit to meaningful OSCE talks, including via chapter III of the OSCE Vienna Document. They did not show up on Wednesday, and do not intend to show up on Friday.

Russia's actions are clearly designed to intimidate, threaten and destabilize Ukraine. We know it, they know it and the international community knows it.

Russia called this meeting today to discuss resolution 2202 (2015). That text is very clear on two points that reflect the core tenets of the Charter of the United Nations, emphasized by the Secretary-General when he addressed this situation only a few days ago: first, that resolving the situation in the eastern regions of Ukraine can be achieved only by peaceful means, and secondly, that there must be full respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine.

Yet we are seeing increasing disinformation about events in Donbas that are straight out of the Kremlin playbook: a blatant attempt by the Russian Government to fabricate a pretext for the invasion of Ukraine. It is therefore clear that we are at a critical juncture to prevent further escalation. Upholding the core tenets of the Charter of the United Nations in respect of peaceful resolution and respecting sovereignty and territorial integrity has never been more important.

Russia must now engage with the diplomatic process that we have built up over several decades and on which global security depends, and resolve the situation through peaceful means.

If Russia chooses to launch an attack at this time of heightened tension, using disinformation as a pretext, it will show that Russia was never serious about diplomatic engagement. Any Russian invasion now would be a conflict of choice for President Putin, and an abdication of Russia's responsibility under the Charter of the United Nations to refrain from the use of force and to maintain international peace and security.

There should be no doubt that any further Russian incursion into Ukraine would be a massive strategic mistake and a humanitarian disaster that will be met with strength, including significant coordinated sanctions. And we will continue to call out the pattern of deception and disinformation from the Russian State.

If Russia is serious about the Charter of the United Nations and its role as a permanent member of the Security Council, it should give the Minsk agreements the chance to be implemented, free from coercion; it should engage seriously with diplomacy; and it should stand down all its troops. There is still time to change path. Conflict can be avoided.

We urge Russia to match its words with actions, to withdraw its troops, to engage meaningfully in talks and to act in the best interest of peace, security and stability in Europe.

Ms. Heimerback (Norway): I thank the briefers for their statements. Let me also use this opportunity to thank all personnel at the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). They contribute on a daily basis to reducing tensions and fostering peace, stability and security on the ground.

The threatening security situation in and around Ukraine is alarming. Norway is deeply concerned by the Russian large-scale military build-up in occupied Crimea to the north, east and south of Ukraine, as well as in Belarus and the Black Sea. The alleged reports of increased shelling are disturbing. They must not be used as a pretext for any military action. Norway calls on Russia to de-escalate and to engage in dialogue, constructively and in good faith, through established international mechanisms.

It remains a major obstacle that Russia falsely seeks to portray the conflict in eastern Ukraine as an internal Ukrainian conflict. The reality is that Russia has fuelled the conflict by providing financial and military support to the armed formations it backs.

Norway expresses strong concern regarding the resolution of the Russian State Duma calling for the recognition of the self-proclaimed “People’s Republics” of Donetsk and Luhansk. We warn against such a step, which would constitute a further violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity and directly contradict the spirit and the letter of the Minsk agreements.

Norway supports the negotiations in the Normandy format and in the Trilateral Contact Group aimed at ending the conflict through a political settlement and the implementation of the Minsk agreements. Norway calls on the parties to uphold their commitments and to

engage constructively towards resolving the conflict by peaceful means.

We welcome the OSCE Chairmanship’s Renewed European Security Dialogue initiative. We encourage Russia to engage in that format. We also urge Russia to respect its commitments under the Vienna Document and contribute to a constructive dialogue and exchange under chapter III.

Norway upholds a European security order based on international law and national sovereignty and territorial integrity. Those principles have repeatedly been invoked by Russia in Council discussions. Norway calls on Russia to respect those principles when it comes to Ukraine.

By threatening posture and rhetoric and unrealistic demands, Russia is challenging European security. Every country has the right to freely choose its security alignment. We cannot allow the established security architecture to be replaced by spheres of influence.

We are concerned about the fact that the ceasefire in Donbas from July 2020 has become increasingly fragile. We call on the parties to seek a durable ceasefire and do their utmost to prevent civilian casualties.

The humanitarian situation is severe after eight years of conflict. Civilians are increasingly losing access to essential life-saving services, as civilian infrastructure is damaged and destroyed. Any escalation of the conflict would lead to devastating humanitarian consequences.

Let me conclude by reiterating Norway’s unwavering support for Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. That includes the Crimean peninsula and its territorial waters.

Mr. De Almeida Filho (Brazil): Brazil follows with concern the situation in eastern Ukraine. The persistent political stalemate and prolonged crisis have reached a critical point. In the present circumstances, renewed and reinvigorated political resolve on the part of all parties is crucial in addressing the conflict.

Achieving and maintaining peace is our collective responsibility. We appreciate the ongoing political and diplomatic efforts aimed at restoring peace and stability in Ukraine and the wider region. We firmly believe that a diplomatic solution must be found to the crisis, and

will continue to support credible initiatives to bring about a peaceful settlement to it.

We reiterate our understanding that resolution 2202 (2015) provides the general guidelines for a peaceful solution to the situation and permanent stability in eastern Ukraine. Unfortunately, resolution 2202 (2015) has not been fully implemented. Brazil urges all parties to fulfil the letter and the spirit of the Minsk agreements.

We urge the parties concerned to pursue genuine dialogue on the implementation of resolution 2202 (2015), which provided the parameters not only to address the situation in eastern Ukraine, but also to assist in diplomatic efforts to overcome the current security challenges in the region. Brazil also welcomes the resumption of talks in the Normandy format and calls for a renewed commitment to finding ways to bring about lasting peace in eastern Ukraine.

A comprehensive ceasefire, which is the first point of the Minsk agreements, remains an essential element in that process. Beyond that, we need further disengagement of forces and military equipment on the ground. Disengagement must allow unimpeded access of humanitarian relief to people in most desperate need. Furthermore, trust among the relevant parties is crucial to strengthening dialogue and achieving a sustainable solution.

Negotiations on the parameters to grant special status to certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions must be conducted with a sense of urgency, flexibility and a spirit of compromise. The implementation of the Minsk agreements must observe full respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine. All parties must bear in mind the letter of the agreements.

We firmly believe that the Security Council has the utmost responsibility to prevent and condemn any attempt to impose a military solution on the crisis. Dialogue and negotiation are the only way to lasting peace. We urge all to parties take the necessary measures to de-escalate tensions and play a constructive role in reaching a political settlement to the Ukrainian crisis, in accordance with international law, particularly the Charter of the United Nations.

Ms. Byrne Nason (Ireland): I would like to offer special thanks to Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo and to Ambassadors Kinnunen and Çevik today for their helpful and informative briefings. I would also like to

recognize the presence of the high-level participants in the Council today.

As I begin my remarks, it is important that I be clear — Ireland is a steadfast and consistent supporter of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.

Ireland believes in and is fully committed to the core principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. They include the sovereign equality and territorial integrity of States. Ukraine has the same fundamental right as every other sovereign and independent State to choose its own foreign policy and ensure the security and defence of its territory. That is a right we hold to be self-evident. It is a right that Ireland struggled to obtain.

As Russia's military build-up at Ukraine's border continues to raise tensions, Ireland again calls for calm, de-escalation and the pursuit of diplomacy. We need to see sustained and credible moves on the ground towards de-escalation. Genuine de-escalation will imply the significant withdrawal of both troops and equipment.

We commend all who are engaged in dialogue, including through the Normandy format and Poland, as OSCE Chair-in Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), for launching the Renewed OSCE European Security Dialogue. We support urgent, constructive and resolute engagement through all diplomatic channels.

The full implementation of the Minsk peace agreements and the related conflict-resolution efforts in the Normandy format and Trilateral Contact Group are important priorities for us. There is no doubt that we are now at a sensitive moment. Today, we call on all parties to act constructively within both formats. In that regard, we deeply regret the decision of the Russian State Duma to submit a call to recognize as independent entities the non-Government-controlled areas in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts of Ukraine. That would be a clear violation of the Minsk agreements. We are also concerned about reports of alleged shelling today in eastern Ukraine, as mentioned by Special Representative Kinnunen, which would also be a violation of the Minsk agreements.

All signatories of the Minsk agreements agreed on the need for safe and secure access for the OSCE's Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) to the entire territory of Ukraine. The mandate of the SMM

was agreed by all 57 OSCE participating States. We therefore remain very concerned about the continuing restrictions imposed on the SMM's freedom of movement. We also regret the fact that SMM equipment has been damaged or interfered with. I would like to express our deep regret concerning the decision by the Russian Federation to refuse to extend the mandate of the Border Observation Mission to monitor the border crossings.

We commend the tireless efforts of Ambassadors Kinnunen and Çevik in the Trilateral Contact Group. We see the agreement reached by the Group at the end of last year on adherence to the July 2020 ceasefire as an important achievement and a sign that there can be progress if there is genuine political will.

Eastern Ukraine has already endured 8 years of conflict, resulting in humanitarian disaster, serious human rights violations and abuses as reported by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Just as we know that further conflict is not inevitable, we know, too, that wherever conflict occurs, it is civilians who bear the brunt. Ireland therefore sincerely calls on all sides to work peacefully towards an effective and sustainable political settlement of the conflict and to jumpstart that work today.

Mr. Tirumurti (India): Let me begin by thanking Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo; Special Representative Mikko Kinnunen and Chief Monitor Yaşar Çevik for their comprehensive briefings on the occasion of the seventh anniversary of the package of measures for the implementation of the Minsk agreements, endorsed unanimously by resolution 2202 (2015). I also welcome Ms. Tetiana Montian to our meeting.

We welcome the efforts under way for the implementation of the Minsk agreements, including through the Trilateral Contact Group and under the Normandy format. We believe that the Minsk agreements provide a basis for a negotiated and peaceful settlement of the situation in eastern Ukraine. Accordingly, we urge all parties to continue to engage through all possible diplomatic channels and keep working towards the full implementation of the Minsk agreements.

We also believe that meetings under the Normandy format will further facilitate the implementation of the provisions of the Minsk agreements, including its

key security and political aspects. In this context, we welcome the recent meetings of political advisors of the Normandy format countries in Paris and Berlin. We also welcome the unconditional observance of the July 2020 ceasefire, the reaffirmation of the Minsk agreements as the basis of work under the Normandy format and the commitment of all sides to reducing disagreements on the way forward.

Any steps that increase tension may best be avoided by all sides in the larger interest of securing international peace and security. Quiet and constructive diplomacy is the need of the hour.

India has been in touch with all concerned parties. It is our considered view that the issue can be resolved only through diplomatic dialogue. India's interest is in finding a solution that can provide for the immediate de-escalation of tensions, taking into account the legitimate security interests of all countries and aimed towards securing long-term peace and stability in the region and beyond. More than 20,000 Indian students and nationals live and study in different parts of Ukraine, including in its border areas. The well-being of Indian nationals is of priority to us.

In conclusion, we reiterate our call for the peaceful resolution of the situation by sincere and sustained diplomatic efforts to ensure that the concerns of all sides are amicably resolved through constructive dialogue.

Mr. Kimani (Kenya): We thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the Special Representative of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Chief Monitor of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine for their briefings.

Kenya cannot contemplate the continued insecurity in eastern Ukraine and the impact it could have on broader security in Europe. Global security is intertwined. Instability in Europe, beyond threatening lives and economies, also disrupts the ability of that important region to play a constructive role in solving the most pressing challenges globally. Insufficient progress in the implementation of the Minsk agreements has been realized since 2014, and that needs to change.

Kenya wants to offer three brief recommendations. In doing so, we hope that they will contribute to a renewed push by all relevant stakeholders to stabilize a situation that, left to escalate, would threaten the very foundations of global stability and the Security

Council's ability to fulfil its mandate in multiple conflict situations.

First, Kenya maintains that respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all countries by all States is a cornerstone of global peace. If multilateralism is to be reborn into a system that delivers sustained peace to all, the most powerful States must consistently adhere to international law and to respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries, in all regions and at all times. We therefore strongly urge all actors respect the peace, security, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. The people of Ukraine deserve inclusive governance, peace and a vibrant economy, which are all deeply dependent on regional stability and cooperation.

Secondly, as we indicated on 31 January in this Chamber (see S/PV.8960), we believe that this standoff is imminently resolvable. Major military Powers, particularly those represented in the Security Council, must make a specific and sustained effort to reach arrangements that deliver a minimum level of deconfliction and mutual respect. Otherwise, third countries and global peace and security will suffer greatly as a result of their confrontations.

Thirdly, Kenya reiterates the obligations of all the parties to fully implement their commitments in accordance with the Minsk agreements, which provide the most promising road map for the peaceful settlement of the current hostilities, including in eastern Ukraine. All parties must take responsibility and reflect that responsibility in a new willingness to agree to compromise

Kenya welcomes the Normandy format advisors meeting held earlier this month and the follow-up meeting, which is scheduled for next month, on implementing the Minsk accords and the consensus reached at the group leaders' summit in Paris in December 2019. We commend the diplomatic leaders of the Russian Federation and the United States and their partners and allies for showing a willingness to meet in the coming days to make further progress.

Mrs. Nusseibeh (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs and Peacebuilding Affairs; Mr. Mikko Kinnunen, Special Representative of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine and in the Trilateral Contact Group; and Mr. Yaşar Halit Çevik, Chief

Monitor of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, for their comprehensive briefings.

We also took note of the briefing by Ms. Tetiana Montian, Ukrainian civil society activist

Since our meeting on 31 January (see S/PV.8960), we have seen intensive diplomatic efforts at various levels — including at the highest levels — to reduce the current tensions in Eastern Europe. We also welcome the further engagement within the Normandy format and hope that these discussions will continue. Such structured formats, particularly those bringing together Russia and Ukraine, along with other stakeholders, are important for furthering dialogue and reducing tensions. They will also help us to find a peaceful and sustainable solution addressing all parties' security concerns.

In this regard, my country stresses the need to maintain and build the current momentum in diplomatic efforts, in particular through steps taken by all concerned parties to engage in constructive dialogue in the interest of de-escalation and the maintenance of regional security and stability. We stress the importance of all parties' implementing the Minsk agreements in full and in good faith, in line with resolution 2202 (2015). In this context, we urge all stakeholders to avoid steps that would make the implementation of the Minsk agreements more difficult.

We also note the important role of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, the presence of which supports efforts for dialogue and confidence-building between the parties and contributes to easing tensions.

At the same time, we must pay attention to the critical situation of civilians in eastern Ukraine, where United Nations reports mention that 3.4 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, 55 per cent of whom are women and 16 per cent children. Furthermore, there are obstacles for the delivery of humanitarian assistance to some of those in need, particularly in areas near the contact line in eastern Ukraine.

We therefore emphasize the importance of not escalating existing tensions, as that may cause serious harm to civilians. In that regard, we call upon all parties to refrain from obstructing access to humanitarian aid or the movement of civilians in conflict areas in accordance with their obligations under international law.

Finally, we reiterate the importance of respecting international law and the Charter of the United Nations, particularly the principles of territorial integrity,

sovereignty and good neighbourliness, as they are essential references for resolving the current crisis and calming tensions in the region.

In conclusion, the United Arab Emirates reiterates the importance of constructive dialogue and ongoing efforts to reach peaceful solutions consistent with international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

Mr. Agyeman (Ghana): I would like to begin by thanking Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo for her briefing on the prevailing situation in eastern Ukraine as it relates to the implementation of the Minsk agreements. I also thank Mr. Mikko Kinnunen, Special Representative of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine and in the Trilateral Contact Group, and Mr. Yaşar Halit Çevik, Chief Monitor of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, for highlighting the efforts of the OSCE in facilitating the political and diplomatic settlement of the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

We have also taken note of the views expressed by Ms. Tetiana Montian, civil society representative from Ukraine.

I further welcome the participation of the representatives of Germany and Ukraine in this meeting.

In welcoming today's discussions, which enable the Council to take stock of the package of measures for the implementation of the Minsk agreements, adopted on 12 February 2015, my delegation recalls the adoption of resolution 2202 (2015), wherein the Security Council expressed its firm conviction that the crisis in the eastern regions of Ukraine could be settled only through peaceful means. Seven years after the adoption of resolution 2202 (2015), the Council's obligation to the maintenance of international peace and security requires it to reiterate its conviction and support for the processes for the further implementation of the Minsk agreements.

Unfortunately, the Minsk agreements remain largely unimplemented and the conflict continues to fester in parts of the Donbas region, with increasing civilian casualties and deepening vulnerabilities, mostly among elderly persons and women-led households. More than 14,000 deaths have been recorded since the conflict in eastern Ukraine began. Several thousands of people have been displaced and 2.9 million people are presently in need of humanitarian assistance. The

implications of the situation in Ukraine for regional, as well as international, peace and security have also been dire.

While recognizing the complex fears and complicated concerns that have been expressed by the parties through the Minsk agreements, we nonetheless believe that good faith, in conformity with existing obligations under the Charter of the United Nations, by concerned Member States should provide clarity to seize the opportunities for supporting continuing dialogue and the engagements required to address the concerns of all parties.

In that respect, Ghana is concerned by the increasing tensions along the borders of Ukraine. We recall, in that regard, the provisions of the Charter that establish the fundamental norms of the post-1945 international order and require that international relations among Member States not involve threats of or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of other States. We therefore entreat all parties to maintain the path of dialogue and diplomacy in addressing any differences that exist between and among them.

Towards the further implementation of peaceful measures for resolving the crisis in the eastern regions of Ukraine, we wish to make the following points.

First, Ghana reaffirms its support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, a bona fide State Member of the United Nations, whose membership of the Organization provides guarantees over its internationally recognized borders.

Secondly, we note the security concerns of other Member States in Europe, especially those in Eastern Europe, and urge restraint by all in maintaining the pacific order in Europe, even as efforts continue to address any concerns with the contemporary European security architecture.

Thirdly, we welcome the high-level diplomatic engagements to address existing concerns over the situation in Ukraine, including recent discussions among the leaders of the Normandy Four, which reaffirmed the ceasefire in the eastern region of Ukraine, as well as the OSCE-facilitated dialogues at different levels. We continue to urge restraint on the part of all sides, calling on the parties to bear in mind the prospective outcomes of ongoing escalation that do not lead to any strategic gain for any party, and encouraging efforts

to address both immediate and long-term interests through diplomacy and dialogue.

Fourthly, we urge renewed dialogue within the Normandy Four process to resolve differences in the interpretation of the sequencing of the package of measures for the implementation of the Minsk agreements. As the saying goes, how can two go on a journey unless they be agreed on the path they intend to take?

Fifthly, we urge the parties to guarantee unimpeded access for humanitarian assistance in both Government-controlled and non-Government-controlled areas, in line with humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law. We further commend the efforts of humanitarian agencies in Ukraine and welcome the 2022 humanitarian response plan to save lives, ensure access to basic services and strengthen the protection of those affected by the conflict and the coronavirus disease.

Finally, let me conclude by stressing Ghana's support for the renewal of the spirit of the Minsk agreements. We urge the parties to work in good faith and with flexibility to make the necessary concessions for an enduring peace in Ukraine, with beneficial outcomes for the rest of Europe and, indeed, the world.

Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo, Special Representative Kinnunen and Ambassador Çevik for their briefings. We also take note of Ms. Montian's remarks. We acknowledge the presence of the high-level participants at this meeting and welcome the representatives of Ukraine and Germany.

The review by the Council of the status of the Minsk agreements concerning the Luhansk and Donetsk regions of eastern Ukraine takes place against a backdrop of high tensions that have generated great concern in the international community.

We therefore believe that it is urgent, first and foremost, to send out a clear and unequivocal signal of the will of the parties to reverse the escalation of tensions and make room for political negotiations. That path comprises three elements: détente, diplomacy and dialogue. We have noted with great interest the announcement of the withdrawal of some troops from the border with Ukraine. If that can be done as soon as possible, it will generate the confidence that only actions can provide and which circumstances demand.

Given that a diplomatic solution is the only real solution, we welcome the willingness that has been displayed by the various stakeholders to continue on the path of dialogue. Mexico acknowledges and is grateful for the efforts of those world leaders who, having influence that they can bring to bear, have personally become involved in order to try to find a peaceful exit to this crisis that can address the various security concerns in the region.

Any solution will mean putting an end to tensions in the east of Ukraine. Eight years into the conflict, the Minsk agreements remain the framework for achieving a negotiated solution. The Trilateral Contact Group and the Normandy format offer that possibility.

As we have heard, the conflict in the east of Ukraine has had a serious impact on the civilian population. It is estimated that approximately 3 million people require humanitarian assistance, while approximately 1.5 million are displaced. The population is also facing restrictions on its freedom of movement, which limits access to health-care and education services.

Mexico asks that freedom of movement for civilians be guaranteed on both sides of the contact line. We also call upon the parties to facilitate humanitarian access to the area in a secure and unrestricted manner, as well as to guarantee the free movement of the Special Monitoring Mission of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which is vital to the comprehensive implementation of its mandate.

We also would like to highlight the fact that mines, unexploded ordnance and other explosive artifacts pose a real threat to and disproportionately affect the civilian population. We call upon the parties to eliminate existing mines and not to place any new explosives.

Mexico reiterates its commitment to respect for the sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, international law and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations.

I conclude by stressing that the tensions around the situation in Ukraine and its potential consequences make the situation very clear, as the Secretary-General has stated. Replacing diplomacy with confrontation would be tantamount to diving over a cliff. The time has come to endorse efforts channelled in one single direction and engage in détente, diplomacy and dialogue.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank you, Sir, for presiding over today's meeting. My thanks also go to Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo; Ambassador Mikko Kinnunen, Special Representative of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine and in the Trilateral Contact Group; and Ambassador Halit Çevik, Chief Monitor of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, for their briefings. I also listened carefully to the remarks made by Ms. Tetiana Montian.

This year 12 February marked the seventh anniversary of the new Minsk agreements. The consideration of the implementation of the new Minsk agreements is the subject of this Security Council meeting. The agreements, which are universally recognized, are a fundamental and binding political document for the settlement of the Ukraine issue and were unanimously endorsed by the Security Council in its resolution 2202 (2015). They therefore deserve complete and effective implementation by all the parties concerned.

Regrettably, however, to date the majority of the agreements' provisions have yet to be truly implemented. New ceasefire violations have occurred on the line of contact. China believes that efforts to resolve the Ukraine issue must go back to the starting point, that is, the implementation of the new Minsk agreements. We hope that all parties concerned will take a constructive posture and resolve through dialogue and consultation whatever differences may arise in the implementation of the agreements and draw up a road map and timetable to implement the agreements to the letter without delay, so as to pave the way for a political solution to the Ukraine crisis.

Concerning the tensions on the eastern border of Ukraine, China believes that in the current context all parties concerned should let reason prevail, adhere to the overarching goal of a political solution and refrain from any act that may provoke tensions or hype the crisis. The parties should fully consider each other's legitimate security concerns and show mutual respect, and, on that basis, properly resolve their differences through consultations held on an equal footing.

China supports all efforts conducive to easing the tensions and notes the Russian Federation's recent diplomatic engagement with France, Germany and other European countries at the leadership level. A negotiated, balanced, effective and sustainable European security

mechanism will provide a solid foundation for lasting peace and stability across Europe. We trust that European countries will take independent and strategic decisions in line with their own interests.

In his most recent public appeal, Secretary-General Guterres said:

"There is no alternative to diplomacy. All issues... can and must be addressed and resolved through diplomatic frameworks".

We support the Secretary-General's good offices aimed at reducing tensions and subscribe to his views.

Everything happens for a reason. NATO's enlargement is an issue that cannot be overlooked when dealing with the current tensions related to the current issue. NATO's continual expansion in the wake of the cold war runs counter to the trend of our times, that is, the maintenance of common security. One country's security cannot be obtained at the expense of that of another one. By the same token, regional security cannot be guaranteed through the strengthening or even expansion of a military bloc. That applies as much to the European region as to other regions of the world.

One country refuses to renounce its cold war mentality. It says one thing and does another in order to seek absolute military superiority. It has been clanning up in the Asia-Pacific region, creating trilateral and quadrilateral small circles or cliques bent on provoking confrontation. What it is doing will only sow division and turmoil in the Asia-Pacific region and seriously threaten the region's peace and stability, to the detriment of the countries in the region and with no benefit to itself.

China urges the countries concerned to learn from history, subscribe to the notion of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security, adhere to the approach of enhancing mutual trust and settling disputes through dialogue and consultation and do more to contribute to world peace and regional stability.

Mr. Hoxha (Albania): I thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo and Ambassadors Kinnunen and Çevik for their briefings. We welcome the high-level participation in this meeting.

Let me first express our gratitude to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, which

is continuing to work in a volatile and unpredictable environment and, as we heard from Ambassador Çevik, under multiple challenges and restrictions. We must continue to support the women and men of the Special Monitoring Mission and their tireless efforts in contributing to reducing tensions and fostering peace, stability and security and to monitoring and supporting the implementation of all OSCE principles and commitments throughout Ukraine.

Albania supports the implementation of the Minsk agreements. We reject any pressure on Ukraine to implement the Minsk agreements according to the interpretation of one side.

Albania expresses its full support for the rights of minorities in Ukraine and anywhere else. Minorities should enjoy their rights and actively participate in the social and political life of the country where they live. That must be part of the overall commitments to equally serving the entire population and building an inclusive and democratic society. Yet, as we have seen more than once, problems start when minorities are intentionally instrumentalized to create dysfunctional States.

Asking for executive powers for Russian minorities in Ukraine means nothing less than taking control of the decision-making power in Kyiv to dictate foreign, security and defence policies and undermine the democratic processes. We should not accept such a policy of fabricating dysfunctional States either in Ukraine or anywhere else.

In that very context, we are deeply concerned by the Russian Parliament's call for the recognition of the independence and sovereignty of parts of the territory of Ukraine. In that regard, we are with a stereotyped playbook that we saw in Georgia in 2008. If taken, such decisions would have no legal validity. They are against international law and the Charter of the United Nations. They run completely counter to the substance of the Minsk agreements.

We continue to be alarmed by the very large-scale, unprovoked and unjustified Russian military build-up in and around Ukraine and in Belarus. The much-claimed withdrawal of some of the troops stationed there is not verified, and credible reports indicate the contrary — a further reinforcement with active combat troops and weapons, which, reportedly, now number 150,000.

That continued and reinforced military surrounding is a sword of Damocles over the Government and the

people of Ukraine. It instigates fear in the population. It frightens domestic and foreign investors and seeks to bring the economy to a collapse and the country to its knees. The decision to partially block the Black Sea, the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait under the pretext of holding regular naval exercises only adds to that strangulation effort. Furthermore, the most recent reports of heavy shelling from the occupied territory in Donbas only reinforce the concerns about the pretext to start executing a long and carefully designed scenario.

In that context, let me reiterate our firm position in support of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. We demand the removal of the occupying troops from the occupied territory. We condemn the illegal annexation of Crimea and its military support to the separatist forces in the country. Albania remains committed to the fundamental principles underpinning European security, including that each nation has the right to choose its own security arrangements.

Any renewed attack on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine would be a clear and further breach of international law and would severely affect European security. It should be met with outright and vigorous condemnation. We call on the Security Council and the international community not to let Ukraine down and not to accept policies and actions that threaten the existence of a sovereign nation.

Despite everything indicating an acceleration of the escalation, we will continue to emphasize the value and the importance of diplomacy and dialogue in reaching a peaceful solution to the conflict in eastern Ukraine and in dealing with Russian concerns. Russia should take the offer to engage in a renewed European security dialogue, initiated by Poland as the current OSCE Chair. We support the call of Secretary Blinken for talks with Minister Lavrov as soon as possible and renewed NATO-Russia Council meetings. Every mechanism for diplomacy and de-escalation must be used and fully exploited.

Finally, we welcome the calls of the Secretary-General to defuse tensions and de-escalate actions on the ground. We would support the intensification of such efforts and the availability of his good offices in the search for a peaceful solution.

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Under-Secretary General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the Special Representative

of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine and the Chief Monitor of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine for their briefings.

The implementation of the Minsk agreements cannot be seen in isolation from the situation on Ukraine's borders, where tensions have reached an unprecedented level in recent days due to increased Russian military activity.

Together with its partners, France has made ongoing efforts over the past few weeks towards de-escalation and dialogue. Our position is based on two pillars.

First, the accumulation of considerable military capabilities on the border of a neighbouring State is threatening and unacceptable behaviour, especially since Russia has already undermined Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity in the past. Any further aggression would have massive consequences and a severe cost for Russia. Europeans are united, and they are ready to act in coordination with all their partners on that issue.

Secondly, France is convinced that de-escalation is possible through dialogue and diplomacy. That is the direction of the efforts led by President Macron, in coordination with the German Chancellor. We are ready to engage in that dialogue, not only with regard to the conflict in Donbas — that is the work that we are doing in the Normandy format — but also on the issues of security and stability in Europe, in line with the fundamental principles set out in the Charter of the United Nations and the founding documents of the OSCE, namely, the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris for a New Europe. In that regard, we fully support the process launched by the Polish OSCE chairmanship for a renewed dialogue on European security.

I would now like to return to the implementation of the Minsk agreements, which has mobilized France and Germany since 2015. Efforts in the Normandy format have continued in recent weeks. The meeting in Paris on 26 January made it possible to reiterate the support of all parties for unconditional respect for the ceasefire. It is necessary to go further, which was unfortunately not possible at the meeting of 10 February, and to finally make tangible progress in implementing the Minsk package of measures in all its dimensions, namely, security, humanitarian and political.

France is firmly convinced that the Minsk agreements are the appropriate framework for continuing the dialogue and that they provide the necessary space to identify mutually acceptable concrete solutions, particularly within the Trilateral Contact Group. We call on the parties to refrain from any statement or action that would undermine the implementation of those agreements.

In that regard, we express our concern about the adoption by the State Duma of the Russian Federation of a resolution calling for the recognition of the separatist territories of Ukraine. If enacted, the resolution would constitute an implicit violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity by Russia and a fundamental challenge to the Minsk agreements.

We also welcome the role of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, which plays a vital role in the de-escalation efforts. It is the eyes and ears of the international community. France, like Germany, will keep its nationals deployed in the field so that the Mission remains operational during this critical period.

We note the information provided by the OSCE concerning possible violations of the ceasefire during the past hours. We should like to see the Special Monitoring Mission systematically establish the facts in an impartial manner.

The defence of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, in particular respect for the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of States and the peaceful settlement of disputes, must be the shared objective of all the members of the Council. France will continue to mobilize in that direction, as well as for the construction of a just and lasting peace and for the restoration of full Ukrainian sovereignty over certain regions of Donetsk and Luhansk.

Mr. Biang (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I thank Under-Secretary-General Rosemary Di Carlo for her briefing. I also thank Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Special Representative Mikko Kinnunen and the Chief Monitor of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, Yaşar Halit Çevik, for their briefings. I further welcome the presence of Ms. Tetiana Montian.

My country continues to follow with great attention the situation along the borders between Russia and Ukraine. We hear the fears and alarming calls of those who fear imminent military action. Above all, we note

with interest the will expressed by all stakeholders to keep the political and diplomatic channels open, as well as the various calls to avoid escalation.

Alongside the rhetoric of alarm and displays of force, the past 10 days have been particularly marked by intense activity on the diplomatic front, which has resulted in European and American initiatives, with the aim of sowing the seeds of dialogue and avoiding the irreparable.

Russia's recent announcement of its withdrawal of some of its troops from duty at its borders is no doubt an auspicious sign of a desire for de-escalation, in addition to Russia's repeated assurances that it has no bellicose intentions. This should contribute significantly to lowering the level of tension and regenerating the thread of trust essential to the conduct of preventive diplomacy.

Along the same lines, my country noted in the recent address of the President of the United States of America an expressed desire to favour dialogue and a rejection of confrontation, which would have disastrous consequences for all.

The situation is certainly not simple, but it is precisely because it is not that it deserves to be approached with serenity and the greatest sense of responsibility. It is to that end that we reiterate our appeal to all stakeholders to demonstrate restraint and to favour the path of dialogue and negotiation, with a view to preserving stability and peace in the region.

We encourage all initiatives that are carried out in favour of de-escalation and the resumption of dialogue, and call on the parties involved to take advantage of the existing diplomatic channels to initiate de-escalation. To this end, the Normandy format and the Minsk agreements constitute reference frameworks.

The Minsk agreements set the stage for an overall peaceful outcome to the various claims of the parties, and it is surely for that reason that they were endorsed by the United Nations. The implementation of the agreements is crucial — in particular to achieve a truce in hostilities, the restoration of Ukraine's borders and a better humanitarian response — while paving the way for a lasting pacification of neighbourhood relations and, ultimately, the promotion of a resumption of economic relations.

My delegation invites the parties to respect the commitments they have undertaken, to capitalize on this foundation of achievements and to return to the

negotiating table. In that regard, the call for dialogue by the United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken is a step in the right direction. Of course, my country remains firmly committed to respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each State. These cardinal principles, enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and the Constitutive Act of the African Union, are the cement of our social contract as members of the international community.

To conclude, I would like, on behalf of my country, to call on the Council to be mobilized more than ever to stem the spectre of fear and reject any logic of confrontation. That is one of the Council's missions. The effectiveness of the tools of peace at our disposal is guaranteed when we show unity and responsibility.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I shall now make a further statement in my capacity as Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.

I have listened very carefully to the statements that have been made by colleagues, and I would like to dwell on some of the issues that were touched upon.

First, I would like to draw the attention of Council members to the unnecessary speculation concerning the appeal of the members of the State Duma to President Putin with a request to acknowledge Donbas. It is a proposal to consider this issue, although the fact that it exists reflects the Russian people's feelings about Donbas. The people of Donbas have been subject to shelling by the Ukrainian army for many years, as we have heard today. It should not be forgotten that hundreds of thousands of people in that Ukrainian region have Russian citizenship. They had no other option after Ukraine stopped upholding its social responsibility towards them. But let me underscore once again that this is an initiative — an appeal from the members of the State Duma. Therefore, what we need to do is to concentrate on the implementation of the Minsk agreements, as many have said today, rather than speculate about this. It is equally important to make sure that we avoid discussing these issues in the Security Council. Otherwise, we will be discussing any decision of any parliament in the world.

Let me draw attention to another thing that President Putin said. He said that we need to do our utmost to make sure that the solution to the problem in Donbas is found through the implementation of the Minsk agreements.

Mr. Cleverly talked today about the prehistory of this the issue, and I do not believe that the picture that he painted was accurate. It was one-sided and superficial. Let me just recall the historic period that preceded many an issue, namely, the illegal and bloody coup d'état in Kyiv in 2014. The radicals and nationalists took power at that time. They refused to engage in dialogue with the Russian-speaking people. They threatened them. The Russian language was and continues to be discriminated against. Versions of history are being put forward that include even the glorification of Nazi criminals. That is something that happened and continues to happen. It led to the separation of Crimea and its reunification with Russia as the result of a referendum. Therefore, we must have a clear and necessary picture of the current conflict that reflects the real situation.

With regard to the alleged prepared aggression of Russia against Ukraine, some people have “very usefully” laid out the military scenarios. That was done by the Secretary of State of the United States. He listed the provocations that could be used as a pretext to invade Ukraine. Such unsubstantiated insinuations are regrettable. I would even go so far as to say that they are dangerous, because they introduce more tension into an already tense atmosphere. But those are just words and statements.

We made several statements at various levels that underscored our proposals and intentions. It is very unfortunate that those statements at the highest level, from Moscow, were not heeded by everyone. What are the facts? The fact is that Russian forces were stationed on Russian territory and remain on Russian territory. The day before yesterday, after their exercises, some of the units started to return to their home base in Russia. Russian officials say — and I will repeat today — that my country is conducting drills on our own territory in a way we find appropriate.

There are other facts, besides the rhetoric to which I would like to draw the Council's attention. Ukraine is in violation of the Vienna Document of 2011, on confidence and security-building measures. There are 120,000 troops deployed on the border with Donbas on the Ukrainian side. According to open-source data, the United States provided weapons to Ukraine last year worth \$650 million. Those are not toys. Those are weapons that can shoot. Another \$200 million worth of weaponry was provided in January. That does not include what is being provided by the United Kingdom, Canada and the Baltic States. All those States send lethal

weaponry to Kyiv: combat drones, Stinger air-defence systems, Javelin antitank weapon systems, small arms and ammunition. Poland provides ammunition for 122- and 152-millimetre weapons, which, as we know, are banned under the Minsk agreements. Why are the aggressive rhetoric and constant warnings about the Russian military threat needed? To supply all of those weapons and to use this situation as a pretext.

It is obvious to us that the final goal of this campaign is to downplay the talks on long-standing legally binding security guarantees for our country. We demanded such guarantees from NATO and the US — in a frank and transparent manner. We are ready for serious dialogue — not an imitation of dialogue, but genuine dialogue. As members know, today the United States Ambassador to Moscow received our written reaction to the United States response on security guarantees. We hope that it will receive careful consideration in Washington, D.C., as it is a very detailed document.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

The representative of the United States of America has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America): I had hoped that we would have heard from our Russian colleagues a response to Secretary Blinken's call for Russia to announce today, without equivocation, that it does not plan to invade Ukraine. Instead, it was a continuation of the disinformation and rhetoric we have heard before and continue to hear.

The Secretary of State laid out the facts. He laid out the facts that we see on the ground. There are facts that we all see very clearly on the ground. What we all see is escalation, including the decision by the Russian Duma to call for recognition of a separatist movement, in total disdain for the Minsk agreements. As stated, I hope that this will not go any further.

Let me just say clearly to all members who called for diplomacy: we will continue to intensify. We will continue to escalate our diplomatic efforts. We call for Russia to cease confrontation and accept our invitation to dialogue. We will look forward to engaging at the negotiating table to discuss the response that the Russians sent to us this morning.

I will end by saying what Secretary Blinken said today. He did not come here to promote war. He came here to prevent war and find a way to a peaceful solution.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Ukraine.

Mr. Kyslytsya (Ukraine): On this day seven years ago, the Ukrainian city of Debaltseve sustained a full-fledged offensive by Russian regular troops and their proxies. Heavy artillery and rocket shelling did not spare the Ukrainian military or civilians. All that happened despite the disengagement line agreed by Ukraine and Russia under the Minsk memorandum of 19 September 2014 — the second document in the set of Minsk agreements, which clearly defined Debaltseve as a Government-controlled area. That happened despite the fact that the Minsk package of measures had been signed a week earlier and that its first provision contained a commitment to a comprehensive ceasefire. That is just one example of how Russia violated the agreements almost immediately after signing them.

Thus far, disregard for honouring commitments remains a hallmark of Russia's strategy. Only this morning, Ukrainian Stanytsia Luhanska was shelled with heavy weaponry from the occupied territory of Donbas. Civilian infrastructure was damaged, including a day-care centre.

Upon the instructions of my Government, I must bring to the attention of the Security Council another outrageous situation that undermines the Minsk agreements and the entire process of a peaceful settlement. Two days ago, the Russian Duma appealed to the Russian President to recognize the occupied parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine as so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics. That decision runs counter to the commitments undertaken by Russia as a signatory to the Minsk agreements. Therefore, in my letter dated 16 February 2022, I requested the Security Council to consider the situation today.

Our standpoint remains unchanged. Russia's recognition of the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics will be tantamount to its deliberate withdrawal from the Minsk agreements. Such a move will deal a serious blow to the political diplomatic settlement that Ukraine and its partners have been actively engaged in promoting. Recognition of the so-called republics will have no legal implications. Russia will not succeed in masking the Russian-occupation administration of the temporarily occupied territories of Luhansk and Donetsk regions as independent entities, or in disguising its own involvement as a party

to the armed conflict in Donbas. Instead, if the Russian President endorses the ruling of the State Duma, it will have much broader destructive consequences for the international rules-based order and the global security architecture. Therefore, Russia has the choice to embarking upon the path of de-escalation and diplomatic dialogue, or experiencing a decisive, consolidated response from the international community.

It is a matter of practical concern that the same pattern has been implemented before. The same language was used in 2008, despite the fact that the Russian Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs just referred to it as just an appeal from the Duma.

In 2008, the appeal by the State Duma of the Russian Federation to then Russian President Medvedev concerning the need to recognize the Republic of South Ossetia and the Republic of Abkhazia preceded the presidential decree on such recognition, adopted on 26 August 2008. Let us not call it a "mere appeal" by the Duma.

I thank Secretary of State Blinken for his powerful statement of 16 February on the issue of the Duma's decision. I thank Foreign Minister Le Drian of France for his clear statement. I thank Minister Cleverly of the United Kingdom for his statement; and I thank the representatives of Norway, Ireland, Albania and the many other partners and responsible members of the international community for their statements on the issue. I would like to ask the Security Council secretariat to include my letter, dated 16 February 2022, as part of the proceedings.

It is important as well, as the soft and feeble reaction of the United Nations in 2008 resulted in the lasting occupation of parts of Georgian territory. I will not quote what former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the former President of the General Assembly said at that time. We hope that the United Nations leadership today has learned its lesson from the occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and that we all — Member States and the Secretariat — will be more vocal in defending the Charter of the United Nations. I have sent my letter on the issue to the Secretary-General, and I am waiting for a meaningful reply on his part.

We call on Russia to take a constructive stance towards achieving progress within the framework of the existing negotiation formats. Otherwise, Russia will bear full responsibility for undermining the Minsk agreements and the process of peaceful settlement

of the armed conflict. The Minsk agreements are the compilation of three documents, and we should approach their implementation from that standpoint, starting with the Minsk protocol of 5 September 2014. Let me recall that, according to paragraph 4 of the document, Ukraine and Russia agreed on the establishment of security zones in the border areas of Ukraine and Russia, with the permanent monitoring and verification of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) on the border. Ukraine expects Russia to deliver on that agreed commitment, which could greatly contribute to resolution efforts.

It is more urgent than ever, as about 150,000 Russian troops have been deployed in the vicinity of Ukraine's borders. We note the statements by Russian officials on their withdrawal, although verification and credible proof are required. Unusual military activities on Ukraine's borders that Russia has refused to explain, in violation of the Vienna Document 2011 on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures, are already having a detrimental economic and social impact on Ukraine, regardless of Russia's ultimate plans.

The military build-up on the ground has been coupled with a blockade by Russia of large parts of the Black Sea under the pretext of naval exercises. That has made navigation and international shipping extremely complicated, causing serious challenges for the major Ukrainian ports. All those actions conform to the concept of the hybrid war being waged against Ukraine, with disinformation and cyberattacks as the other important components. For instance, most recently, Russia played another propaganda ace-up-its-sleeve, blaming Ukraine for genocide in the occupied territories. Those are fake and irresponsible allegations by Russia, aimed at hiding its responsibility for the occupation of Ukrainian territories and subsequent human rights violations there.

Ukraine remains committed to the peaceful resolution of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict by political-diplomatic means. Ukraine wants peace, security and stability, not only for itself, but also for all of Europe. At the same time, I reiterate that, in the event that Russia opts for escalation, Ukraine will defend itself. We welcome all diplomatic and other efforts taken at different levels to prevent the worst-case scenario. We are grateful for the support for and solidarity with Ukraine that have been explicitly demonstrated worldwide.

We reiterate the need to further explore all political means to ensure de-escalation. Reinvigorating the Normandy format and the Trilateral Contact Group is one of the necessary steps. Both include Russia and Ukraine as parties to the conflict and constitute the proper framework for the direct dialogue that Russia continues to avoid, while hiding behind its puppet occupation administrations. As long as Russia sets preconditions for direct dialogue between Ukraine and Moscow's proxies, which are effectively a non-starter, progress on the implementation of the Minsk agreements will remain elusive.

It was therefore important that political advisers met in Paris and Berlin, despite the fact that many divergences on the implementation the Minsk agreements persist. We are ready to resume the Normandy Four talks in all formats, including at the leadership level. We regret that Russia remains unwilling to hold a Normandy Four summit.

Since our leaders previously met in Paris in December 2019, the decisions then adopted remain unimplemented by Russia despite the fact that Ukraine has regularly proposed concrete initiatives for a ceasefire, humanitarian demining, the withdrawal of troops and hardware, the mutual release of detained persons, opening new entry-exit points, ensuring unimpeded access for the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) throughout the conflict-affected area and the implementation of the political provisions of the Minsk agreements.

On 22 December 2021, we managed to find a common understanding on resuming the ceasefire regime, initially launched in July 2020. We offered far-reaching compromises to strike a deal, but ceasefire violations by the Russian occupation forces have not yet ended.

Restrictions on the SMM's freedom of movement continue to be a major impediment for the full implementation of the SMM mandate. At the most recent meeting of the Trilateral Contact Group on February 9, Chief Monitor Çevik provided statistics confirming that 90 per cent of restrictions imposed on the freedom of movement of SMM patrols occur in the temporarily occupied territories of Donbas.

We call on Russia to ensure unfettered access for the SMM to the entire territory under its effective control, in particular in the border areas. That is particularly important against the backdrop of Russia's decision not

to extend the mandate of the OSCE Observer Mission on the border at the Russian checkpoints at Gukovo and Donetsk, which were shut down in September 2021. In that regard, we support the initiative of France and Germany to establish a coordination and verification mechanism for the OSCE SMM.

On the political track, discussions on issues, such as the implementation of the so-called Steinmeier formula, the special status of local self-government in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, the amnesty law and the modalities of local elections continue to be blocked by the Russian side. The Russian representatives simply refuse to continue discussions on the working proposals submitted by the Ukrainian delegation in June 2020, relating to the special status of local self-government in certain areas in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine and other issues on the agenda of the political working group.

Ukraine has taken steps on the implementation of agreed provisions relating to the political process. In particular, we have submitted initial proposals for the consideration of the Trilateral Contact Group on the law on the special status of local self-government in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine.

According to the standards of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the resumption of control of the border should be a prerequisite for holding local elections in Donbas. Otherwise, it would be impossible to create the necessary security environment for holding democratic elections in line with OSCE standards.

It remains up to Russia to take decisions that would lead to the full implementation of the commitments it has undertaken under the Minsk agreements, which were signed by President Putin's Ambassador to Ukraine, Mr. Mikhail Zurabov, in blue ink on 5 September 2014 — who also signing agreements on 19 September 2014 and 12 February 2015.

Drawing lessons from the past, we urge Russia to abandon its long-standing strategy on Ukraine based on threats and the use of force against the territorial integrity of the country, and instead re-engage with the fundamental principles of peaceful relations enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

(spoke in Russian)

Mass media recently disseminated a text that is attributed to Mr. Vershinin's colleague Ms. Maria Zakharova. Please allow me to quote from it:

“From the viewpoint of international law, the geopolitical transformations of 1991 did not result in the disappearance of the Soviet Union as a subject of international law. The State that was called the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics [USSR] did not come to an end, but rather continued its existence under international law.”

Therefore, I wonder how Mr. Vershinin feels sitting in the Security Council as the representative of the USSR? That would seem to be what is implied. When I hear such statements and after listening to comrade Montian, I want to repeat the same words I said at the exact same meeting on the implementation Minsk agreements on 18 February 2020 (see S/PV.8726). Those words were written by a famous Russian poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko in 1962:

“Let some repeat over and over again:
‘Compose yourself!’
I shall never find rest.
As long as Stalin's heirs exist on earth,
It will seem to me
That Stalin is still in the mausoleum.”

I would remind Mr. Vershinin that we are in the twenty-first century. Let us return to the Charter of the United Nations and go about implementing its provisions. Let us change Article 23 and implement Articles 22, 24 and 108.

The President *(spoke in Russian)*: I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Ms. Leendertse (Germany): Germany is grateful for the opportunity to speak at today's meeting. We would like to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the Special Representative of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine and in the Trilateral Contact Group and the Head of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) in Ukraine.

Together with France, Germany remains committed to achieving progress in the Normandy format, which plays a central role in advancing the implementation of the Minsk agreements. Many obstacles remain.

However, the reaffirmed ceasefire of July 2020 proved that progress can be made if political will exists. With regard to recent reports on increased shelling in eastern Ukraine, we call for the agreement to be observed. Attacks on civilian infrastructure are utterly unacceptable.

Talks were held on 26 January in Paris and on 10 February in Berlin. All participants committed themselves to the full implementation of the Minsk agreements and to continuing talks in the Normandy Four and the Trilateral Contact Group formats.

In that respect, we express our strong concern about the resolution of the Russian State Duma calling on the President of the Russian Federation to recognize the self-declared People's Republics of Luhansk and Donetsk as independent States. That would run counter to the Minsk agreements and constitute a further breach of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

In the current tense situation, it is very important to establish facts and identify disinformation. We commend the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission's indispensable role in establishing facts on the security situation. We must ensure that it can carry out its full mandate without interruption throughout Ukraine. That is why Germany, as well as France and other partners, has left its seconded staff on the ground. That is also why we are deeply concerned about the restrictions on SMM monitors' freedom of movement and destruction of their equipment.

These days, we cannot evaluate the state of the Minsk agreements without factoring in military developments in the region. In recent months, an unprecedented military build-up of Russian forces has taken place on the Russian and Belarusian side of Ukraine's border. It is near impossible not to perceive that as a threat or as preparation for an attack. We deplore that Russia has thus far failed to provide any satisfactory explanation for that course of action. The Charter of the United Nations is crystal-clear in that respect, prohibiting not only the use of force but also the mere threat of using force.

Germany fully supports the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders and in line with the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, the Helsinki Final Act, the Paris Charter and all OSCE commitments. In order to defuse tensions, we have stepped up our diplomatic efforts in close

coordination with our French partners. We have taken note of Russia's recent announcement to downsize its troop presence along the Ukrainian border, but we call on Russia to follow up on that announcement immediately and withdraw its troops from Ukraine's border in a substantial and verifiable manner.

Russia should be aware that any military aggression against Ukraine would entail severe political, economic and geostrategic consequences. Moreover, we urge Russia to provide full transparency regarding its military activities. To that end, Russia should make full use of the information and consultation mechanisms provided for by the Vienna Document within the OSCE framework. Together with its partners and allies, Germany remains open to discussing security concerns of mutual interest with Russia.

If a sovereign State Member of this Organization adopts an aggressive posture towards another sovereign State Member of the Organization, that is not something the United Nations and its Member States should be casual about. It is good for United Nations bodies to remain abreast of the situation around Ukraine, on which we will hold a debate in the General Assembly on 23 February. Germany will remain strongly committed to finding a diplomatic solution, and we hope others will too.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I shall now make a further statement in my capacity as the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.

We heard here today words such as "war" and "aggression". But the most interesting thing was that no one ever said those words on behalf of Russia here at the United Nations — or will say those words. I regret that the very powerful statements made by President Putin in recent days with regard to the situation in eastern Ukraine were not heard. I would like our partners to at least hear what was said at the press conferences in Moscow, where we received visits from high-level officials such as the President of France and the Chancellor of Germany. Negotiations were held and detailed press conferences took place where our guests and the President of the Russian Federation spoke.

We are holding a meeting today on the Minsk package of measures. I am very satisfied with the fact that most of the statements indicated that the Minsk agreements are a very clear — and the sole — international legal framework to settle the intra-Ukrainian conflict.

By the way, I have a great deal of respect for our interpreters and how they manage to keep up to speed with what is said — and to do it correctly.

I have two requests.

First, Zelenskyy called the Minsk agreements “totally without merit”. I would like to hear how it was interpreted to English and French, I will not be able to hear it in other languages. I am assuming the meaning was conveyed.

Secondly, I listened very carefully to the statement just made by Mr. Kyslytsya, including his remarks on the legality of Russia’s membership of the United Nations and the Security Council. Unfortunately, I must note that it is not the first time that representatives of other countries, including Ukraine, have sought to self-aggrandize by using that argument. The calculus here is very clear. It is intended for the benefit of those who are not very well-versed in these issues and are not familiar with international law. But professionals know, and people in general know. If we are going to discuss whether or not Russia went through the process for becoming a Member of the United Nations, perhaps we could then raise the issue of whether Ukraine did so. Or are we still dealing with the Ukrainian Soviet Republic? Russia is the State continuing the legal personality of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Essentially, only the name of the State was changed, while Ukraine is, in fact, the successor State — a new State entity.

With regard to quoting poems, it is a very good thing when a political message comes in poetic form. I myself like poems — about beauty, for example — including by Zabolotskiy, a Soviet poet. Remember those verses?

And if it is so, then what is the beauty

And why do people worship it?

Is it a completely empty vessel

Or the fire flickering in it?

I myself would compare beauty with wisdom. We need to have wisdom. We have to be sure to come up with wise decisions, including when it comes to a settlement in eastern Ukraine on the basis of the Minsk package of measures.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

I would like to ask whether the briefers have any additional comments.

I now again give the floor to Ms. Montian.

Ms. Montian (*spoke in Russian*): Many people have written to me since my statement, asking me to please tell the Security Council that no one is in fear of an imminent Russian invasion, except for those people who have been inflicting violence on Ukraine into an eighth year now. They will leave Ukraine clinging to American aircraft. The rest of them will take it in stride — because that was precisely the reason behind the actions of the collective West in the Maidan and their coup d’état. That was the game: to throw in troops of the current Kyiv regime into Donetsk and Luhansk, get a response and then play a game with sanctions. But we will see who has the most to lose from sanctions.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.