



Security Council

Seventy-fourth year

8575th meeting

Tuesday, 16 July 2019, 10 a.m.

New York

Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Meza-Cuadra	(Peru)
<i>Members:</i>	Belgium	Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Moriko
	Dominican Republic	Mr. Singer Weisinger
	Equatorial Guinea	Mrs. Mele Colifa
	France	Mr. De Rivière
	Germany	Mr. Heusgen
	Indonesia	Mr. Syihab
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	South Africa	Mr. Mabhongo
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Mr. Hunter

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 Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of 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, and Mr. Lamberto Zannier, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe High Commissioner on National Minorities.

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

I give the floor to Ms. DiCarlo.

Ms. DiCarlo: I last briefed the Security Council on Ukraine on 25 April (see S/PV.8516) following the election of President Volodymyr Zelenskyi on 21 April.

Today the Council is meeting again only days before another important election, on 21 July, when Ukrainians will go to the polls to elect their representatives in Parliament, the Verkhovna Rada. We hope that the elections will be equally peaceful and democratic and that they will be inclusive, including reflecting the broadest participation of women.

In his inauguration speech, President Zelenskyi emphasized the need for peace and unity and for rejecting divisive policies. He underlined his readiness to engage in dialogue in order to advance domestic reforms and end the five-year conflict in eastern Ukraine. The United Nations is encouraged by such statements emphasizing dialogue, peace and inclusiveness. We welcome efforts at dialogue at all levels, including bilaterally between Heads of State, and hope that they can bring greater momentum towards resolving the conflict.

Today's Council meeting coincides with the coming into force of the law on ensuring the functioning of the Ukrainian language as the State language. The law,

which regulates the use of Ukrainian as the sole State language in a broad sphere of Government functions and services, was adopted by the Verkhovna Rada on 25 April and signed into law on 15 May.

It was adopted after two readings and the consideration of more than 2,000 amendments, 800 of which have been included. While many of its provisions commence today, the law also prescribes a transitional period, from six months to up to 10 years, for the implementation of other provisions. Also, the law requires the Cabinet of Ministers to submit to Parliament a draft law on the realization of the rights of national minorities of Ukraine by January 2020.

While the new law has raised concerns both within and outside Ukraine, the Ukrainian authorities have described it as consistent with Ukraine's Constitution, particularly article 10, which deals with State and minority languages, as well as its national legislation and international commitments.

As part of its regular reporting, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) followed the legislative process and shared recommendations based on international standards with the relevant authorities. While many of the controversial points were addressed in its final version, the law still raises concerns.

OHCHR recommends that the Ukrainian Government should elaborate, as established by the language law, a law on the realization of the rights of national minorities of Ukraine in order to ensure a fair correlation between the protection of the rights of minorities and the preservation of the State language as a tool for integration within society. That should be done without undue delay.

The Council of Europe's Venice Commission is also analysing the law. The draft opinion is expected to be discussed by the Commission after the 21 July parliamentary elections.

In that context, we welcome the previous statement by President Zelenskyi that a thorough analysis of the law will be conducted. We hope that that will pave the way for further measures to safeguard the rights of minorities.

The Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) High Commissioner on National Minorities has also advised the Ukrainian authorities regarding language questions in the interest

of ensuring balanced legislation that unites Ukraine's diverse society. I therefore welcome the availability of the OSCE High Commissioner, Mr. Lamberto Zannier, to brief the Council in person on the issue.

It is the fourth time since the beginning of 2019 that the Security Council is meeting on Ukraine. The current political transition in Ukraine takes place against the backdrop of the ongoing conflict in Donbas, many of whose residents continue to face the serious daily challenges associated with an active conflict.

In recent weeks, we have seen signs that, with sufficient political will in the Trilateral Contact Group, concrete steps to improve the security and humanitarian situation along the contact line are possible. We welcome the 26 June disengagement of forces and removal of hardware at the Stanytsia Luhanska checkpoint, as reported by the OSCE's Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. Such steps should be further built on. We hope to see other confidence-building steps, including the restoration of the Stanytsia Luhanska pedestrian crossing bridge and the release of detainees.

However, we note with regret the persistent failure to reach agreement on a ceasefire. We wish to once again echo the call of the OSCE for all concerned to work constructively, including during tomorrow's Trilateral Contact Group meeting, in order to reach an agreement on the issue without further delay. The implementation of a lasting ceasefire should be accompanied by the withdrawal of heavy weapons from populated areas, the disengagement of forces and the protection of civilians and critical civilian infrastructure.

The situation at the contact line remains unpredictable and volatile. Periodic escalations of hostilities bring about various levels of intensity of military engagement. Despite continuing security incidents and limitations on its activities, the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission, under the leadership of the new Chief Monitor, Ambassador Halit Çevik, continues to carry out its crucial mandate.

Meanwhile, the human cost of the conflict is still growing. Ordinary civilians continue to be targeted and suffer from indiscriminate shelling on a daily basis, as well as from the threat of landmines. This year alone, as of 30 June, OHCHR recorded 91 conflict-related civilian casualties — 13 killed and 78 injured. Fighting also continues to damage and disrupt civilian infrastructure. From May to June, the Donetsk Filter Station, which supplies clean water to approximately

380,000 people on both sides of the contact line, came under fire on three separate occasions. So far this year, water facilities have come under attack more than 60 times. Schools have also come under attack 17 times, already more than in 2018.

We once again reiterate that parties to the conflict must take all precautions to avoid civilian harm. International humanitarian law must be upheld by all to protect civilians and their access to critical services. Humanitarian organizations are providing relief to the most vulnerable communities on both sides of the contact line, but safe, predictable and sustained access to all those in need is still a challenge. Their work must not be politicized or instrumentalized by any party.

The Council unanimously endorsed the package of measures for the implementation of the Minsk agreements in resolution 2202 (2015), of 17 February 2015. In presidential statement S/PRST/2018/12 of 6 June 2018, the Council once again unanimously reaffirmed the centrality of the Minsk agreements, and on 12 February 2019 the Council held a special meeting (see S/PV.8461) focusing on the implementation of the Minsk agreements. The United Nations expects any concerns related to the Minsk agreements to be addressed through constructive dialogue within the existing negotiation formats, in full respect for the spirit and letter of the agreements, and with a view to implementing the Minsk agreements as a whole.

Ukraine today has the opportunity to build further on its reform record and to revitalize the diplomatic efforts to resolve the five-year conflict in eastern Ukraine. That will require, first and foremost, political will on the part of all concerned in the critical search for peace. We hope that, following the parliamentary elections and the formation of a new Government, the recent encouraging statements will be followed by concrete actions by all actors to bring about at long last a positive dynamic to implement the Minsk agreements.

In his congratulatory message to President Zelenskyyi, the Secretary-General underscored the full support of the United Nations for the crucial efforts of the Normandy Four, the Trilateral Contact Group and the OSCE to resolve the conflict in eastern Ukraine. He further reaffirmed the United Nations commitment to the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine, within its internationally recognized borders in accordance with the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions.

In a regional and global environment that is increasingly fragile, the opportunity for a resolution of the conflict in eastern Ukraine is also a chance to achieve greater peace and security in Europe. It should not be missed.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Zannier.

Mr. Zannier: Following your invitation to brief the Security Council, Mr. President, I am glad to share some of my considerations on the issue at hand, in line with my conflict-prevention mandate and to the extent permitted by its confidentiality clause.

Later this week, in the margins of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, my Office will convene a meeting with other regional organizations to examine how successful integration policies can help strengthen the coherence of diverse societies and their resilience to conflicts and crises. In particular, we will focus on the role of youth and the importance of balanced policies in the field of education as tools to promote the full participation of every member of society in public life.

Over the years, my Office has developed a set of guidelines and recommendations addressing important issues, such as education and the use of language, and those recommendations are at the basis of our engagement with all relevant States members of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe States (OSCE). It is also based on those guidelines and recommendations that successive High Commissioners on National Minorities have cooperated for more than two decades with the authorities of Ukraine on various sets of policies related to the integration of Ukraine's diverse society, in particular on issues related to language and education. Since I took office, I have closely followed the adoption of the law on education of 2017 and every stage of the process of drafting the law on ensuring the functioning of Ukrainian as the State language.

In that connection, I have visited Ukraine a number of times to engage with the authorities, representatives of national minority communities and other relevant interlocutors. As I pointed out on a number of occasions in my interaction with the Government and the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, Ukraine has indeed every right to strengthen the role of the State language to enhance

a shared sense of belonging. Steps in that direction, however, should be balanced with concerted efforts to accommodate the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the country. Accordingly, minority rights, including in the sphere of language and education, should be taken into account and respected, in line with Ukraine's OSCE commitments and international standards.

A balanced and pragmatic linguistic policy should ideally be achieved through positive means and incentives rather than penalties, as well as take regional specifics into account, also with a view to facilitating progress with the resolution of the conflict in and around Ukraine. That would help to establish an enabling environment for increasing the use of the State language as a tool for integration.

Thorough consultations with all relevant stakeholders, including national minorities, should take place at every stage of the process to reach a broad societal consensus, increase ownership and arrive at a mutually acceptable and inclusive policy. The opinion and input from relevant international institutions, including the Council of Europe's Venice Commission, can help to ensure that language-related legislation is in line with international standards. Legislation related to language and national minorities should be developed in a comprehensive way to ensure consistency and avoid gaps in the legislative framework related to national minorities.

The law on ensuring the functioning of Ukrainian as the State language was promulgated during my visit to Kyiv in May. I therefore discussed that and prospective legislation regulating the use of languages in the country with the outgoing presidential Administration and several ministries, as well as with the Chairpersons of all the relevant Committees of the Verkhovna Rada. I also shared my considerations with regard to Ukraine's language policy in an op ed piece published on the eve of my visit, as well as in my letter to President Zelenskyi following my visit, outlining possible ways forward and pointing out that the language question should be addressed in a way that unites rather than divides Ukraine's diverse society. I also noted that President Zelenskyi had made the same point in his own inauguration speech.

Concerning the text of the law, the following are the main considerations to which I would like to draw the attention of the Security Council.

Compared with the text adopted in the first reading, the promulgated version introduces differentiated transition periods for the implementation of language provisions in various spheres of State language use. I welcome the fact that the State language law extends the transition period for the implementation of article 7 of the law on education until 2023 for European Union (EU) languages. However, the distinction between EU and non-EU languages, as highlighted by the Venice Commission in reference to the law on education, remains a concern. Elements of a punitive approach remain. The law establishes the Office of the Plenipotentiary, not only with a mandate to monitor the implementation of the law on the State language, but also with the power to issue warnings and fines.

I also took note of the reference in the law and the commitment of the authorities to adopting legislation to realize the rights of national minorities within six months, which I assess as a positive intention. Beyond that stated commitment, however, the law on the State language, as it stands, does not ensure sufficient legal clarity or guarantees for the protection of the linguistic rights of persons belonging to national minorities. Therefore, pending the adoption of that prospective law on the rights of national minorities, the protection of their linguistic rights remains unclear.

Ideally, Ukraine's language policy should be supplemented by a modernization of the overall legal framework safeguarding the rights of national minorities, including in the linguistic sphere, through the introduction of a comprehensive law. All relevant stakeholders, in particular the representatives of national minorities, should be effectively consulted on the development of that legislation.

On the part of my institution, I remain willing and committed to assisting the new leadership and the new Government in the development of a pragmatic and forward-looking policy, including in the area of education, that would comply with Ukraine's international commitments and lay a solid foundation for the development of a well-integrated and cohesive society.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Zannier for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the Peruvian presidency for convening today's meeting.

I would like to begin by saying that we absolutely agree with the fact that protecting and promoting the language of a titular nation is the responsibility of all States, including Ukraine. We do not object to the Ukrainian language, which, incidentally, is understood, loved and respected in Russia. However, we speak in defence of the Russian language. The biased Ukrainian authorities have adopted draconian medieval methods to eradicate it. They have banned communication in Russian in the majority of public spaces, which is at variance with all conventions protecting the interests of national minorities and basic human rights. It defies common sense and the basic norms of civilized conduct.

Let us take an example from an interview with Mr. Mykyta Poturaev, a candidate for the Verkhovna Rada and adviser to the President of Ukraine on political issues. In it, he proposes that the Russian language be renamed "Rossian" and that Russia be renamed "Moskovia". He also proposed that the Russian language be used as a weapon against our country.

In anticipation of the question we will certainly hear today, how is the language issue relevant to the Security Council's agenda? It is directly related to its agenda. The document signed by former President Poroshenko on 15 May is a direct violation of the letter and spirit of the package of measures for the fulfilment of the Minsk agreements, approved by resolution 2202 (2015). We should all therefore provide a principled and impartial assessment of the of the new Ukrainian law. I hope that all of our colleagues can resist the temptation to shield Kyiv from the warranted criticism resulting from the adoption of that law and devote our meeting with other topics. Let us recall that the main provisions of the document, which provides for the most brutal forced Ukrainization of all spheres of public life and gradually introduces fines for failing to use the Ukrainian language, enter into force today. The Russian-speaking citizens of the country will be stripped of an opportunity to be educated in their native language, including in universities and schools.

I will not repeat myself today and give specific examples from the text of the law. I already did so on 20 May (see S/PV.8529). Since then neither we nor the Russian-speaking residents of the country have had any reason to adopt a different approach to it. The issue is not

an internal matter in Ukraine. We categorically reject that interpretation. For those who genuinely understand recent Ukrainian history, it is clear that the issue of linguistic and cultural identity lies at the heart of the tragic fracture that the country has endured since the Maidan coup d'état of 2014. The threat to ban Russian as an official language in the south-east was voiced by the Maidan representatives who seized power. That, in turn, led to internal divisions and confrontations, which have resulted in the current ongoing crisis and territorial division.

Accordingly, if there is no resolution to the problem in the spirit of public consensus and harmony, there can be no genuine progress towards cohesion and, as a consequence, there can be no end to the domestic fratricidal conflict in eastern Ukraine. Those who attempt to defend the actions of the Maidan authorities claim that such action is geared towards supporting the State language as it pertains to the issue of languages of national minorities. That also includes Russian-speaking Ukrainians. It might appear logical but any objective expert on Ukraine would confirm that in that country such an approach is hardly applicable. The Russian-speaking citizens of Ukraine are not a national minority in the traditional sense of the term. In spite of official Maidan statistics, according to which the Russian language is allegedly no longer spoken in Ukraine, all other sources and surveys show that Russian remains the native or preferred language of communication for the majority of Ukraine's population.

According to the American analytics company Gallup, in the late 2000s 83 per cent of respondents in Ukraine said that Russian was their preferred language and an extremely important subject taught to children in school. Google search engine results revealed in 2014 that more than 90 per cent of search queries from Ukraine were made in the Russian language. Even the staunchest Maidan propagandists are forced to admit that, for at least 25 per cent of Ukrainian residents, Russian is the native language. Do those statistics not make it clear that restrictive and punitive measures against the Russian language in that country, at the very least, stoke divisions and social confrontation? Incidentally, the new Ukrainian authorities, which received support from 75 per cent of Ukrainians during the most recent presidential elections, from the very beginning expressed doubts about the rectitude of the policy of the forced Ukrainization of the country and the formation of what is virtually a language inquisition.

The new President, Volodymyr Zelenskyi, and his team repeatedly made it clear that after the formation of a new Ukrainian Parliament they intended to scrutinize the ineligibility of the law on Ukraine's State language.

The Parliament of Ukraine — the Verkhovna Rada — also has several questions about the law. On 21 June, parliamentarians registered a petition with the Constitutional Court of Ukraine with respect to the law on Ukraine's State language, as it is at odds with the Constitution, violates the right of citizens to use their native language and, consequently, creates an atmosphere of intolerance in the society. And just today, in the Verkhovna Rada, a bill was registered to repeal the language law, which violates the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

Under those circumstances, a great deal today depends upon us. Council members can either play into the hands of the Maidan politicians, who have discredited themselves, headed by former President Poroshenko, and pretend that the law on the State language should be adopted quietly and without criticism, or they can send a clear message that the struggle for the preservation of national and cultural identity should not devolve into the violation of the rights of the Russian-speaking population in Ukraine. In particular, former President Poroshenko recently stated that so long as Mr. Zelenskyi speaks Russian, the country is in danger. Threats to him in that regard were repeatedly made by other so-called nationalist Maidan activists. There is no consensus on the language issue in Ukraine. The adoption of the law on language was a purely political decision that failed to reflect the opinion of the Ukrainian population, the current situation in the country and the unique features of the multinational Ukrainian society.

In order not to fuel such a distorted and dangerous mindset for Ukraine, we propose that we send a clear message today about the Council's support for unity and cohesion among Ukrainians, instead of divisions. That is the only way that we, together, not in words but in deed, can demonstrate our shared commitment to the Minsk agreements, with which Ukraine categorically refuses to comply.

Mr. Hunter (United States of America): The support of the United States for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity is unwavering. We are committed to working with the Ukrainian people to promote

democracy and prosperity and root out corruption. President Trump underscored that message to President Zelenskyi following peaceful competitive elections that reflected Ukraine's vibrant democracy.

Russia's actions in Ukraine since 2014 have led to approximately 13,000 conflict-related deaths, including more than 300 Ukrainian soldiers killed or wounded this year in the conflict in eastern Ukraine, which was stirred up by Russia. In the face of Russia's aggression and efforts to undermine the country, Ukraine instead continues to grow more united, more cohesive, more resilient and stronger.

We welcome the opportunity today to discuss issues that Ukraine's minority groups face. Since 2014, Russian occupation forces have carried out a campaign of violence, including dozens of extrajudicial killings and forcible disappearances, imprisonment and torture, against Crimean Tatars, ethnic Ukrainians and others. We call on Russia to end its systematic abuse of Ukraine's Crimean Tatar community and Ukrainian nationals in Crimea and the Donbas region.

We note with concern Russia's suppression of education in the languages of national minorities in Crimea. Only 249 schoolchildren are being educated in the Ukrainian language this year, down from 12,694 children in the school year before Russia's occupation began, according to data gathered by the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine.

In contrast, we commend President Zelenskyi's support for the promotion of Ukrainian language efforts to promote national unity. While President Zelenskyi has promised to take steps to strengthen relations between Kyiv and Ukrainians living in eastern Ukraine, Russia perpetually undermines unity, as exemplified recently by its decision to issue passports to Ukrainians residing in conflict areas.

Sombrely, we note that, five years ago tomorrow, 298 innocent civilians were killed in the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH-17. The United States again extends its deepest sympathies to the families and friends of the victims and calls for justice on behalf of those who lost their lives.

As the findings of the Joint Investigation Team made clear, the BUK missile launcher used to bring down the passenger aircraft was owned by Russia and was assigned to Russia's 53rd Anti-aircraft Brigade. The launcher was brought into sovereign Ukrainian

territory, fired from territory controlled by Russia and Russian-led forces in eastern Ukraine and then returned to Russian territory. We recall the Security Council's demand that those responsible be held to account and that all States cooperate fully with efforts to establish accountability. We call upon Russia to respect and adhere to resolution 2166 (2014) and ensure that any indicted individuals currently in Russia face justice.

More recently, Russia escalated its aggressive activities when it blocked the lawful passage of Ukrainian naval vessels and attacked them near the Kerch Strait in November. The United States calls on Russia to respect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, including its territorial waters, and we reiterate our call to Russia to immediately release the detained Ukrainian crew members and naval vessels. That would be an important demonstration of Russia's readiness to engage more constructively with Ukraine.

Russia must end its occupation of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula. Our Crimea-related sanctions will remain in place until Russia returns control of the peninsula to Ukraine, and our sanctions against Russia for its aggression in eastern Ukraine will remain in place until Russia fully implements the Minsk agreements. As Secretary Pompeo stated in our declaration on Crimea last year, the United States rejects Russia's attempted annexation of Crimea and pledges to maintain that policy until Ukraine's territorial integrity is restored.

Mr. De Rivi re (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo and Mr. Lamberto Zannier for their briefings on the difficult situation Ukraine is facing due to a conflict that has, lest we forget, claimed more than 13,000 lives.

That situation is not the result of the adoption, on 25 April, of the law on the use of Ukrainian as a national language. The law is in no way a threat to international peace and security. It is up to the Ukrainians to make their own choices regarding linguistic policies, inter alia, while respecting their European and international commitments. The early parliamentary elections to be held next Sunday will contribute to that.

Nevertheless, the multiple violations of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity since 2014 are a source of great concern and a threat to international peace and security. I wish to take this opportunity to reaffirm France's commitment to the territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty of Ukraine

within its internationally recognized borders. France does not and will not recognize the illegal annexation of Crimea. I also reiterate France's condemnation of Russia's decision to facilitate the granting of Russian citizenship to Ukrainian citizens living in certain areas of the oblasts of Donetsk and Luhansk. By doing so, Russia is deliberately undermining the spirit of the Minsk agreements.

As we commemorate the fifth anniversary of the tragic downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH-17, our thoughts are with the families and loved ones of the 298 victims. They deserve the truth, to have the perpetrators identified and justice to be delivered in accordance with resolution 2166 (2014).

Furthermore, France once again calls for the release of the 24 Ukrainian seamen captured during the naval incident in the Kerch Strait in November, as was also demanded by the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea in May.

I would now like to underscore two points.

First, there have been some positive developments in recent weeks and days. Under the leadership of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyi, the work of the Trilateral Contact Group resumed in a constructive manner as of 5 June. Again, at the initiative of the new Ukrainian authorities, the disengagement of forces in the pilot zone in Stanytsia Luhanska was implemented on 30 June. That is a significant step forward in terms of security and is paving the way for improvements in the humanitarian situation. I would also like to commend the resumption of bilateral contacts at the highest level between Ukraine and Russia, crystallized by an initial telephone exchange between the President of Ukraine and the President of the Russian Federation on 11 July.

My second point is that it is now necessary to create momentum, on the basis of those first positive developments, that generates the trust that is indispensable for the settlement of the conflict. We bear a responsibility to the 3.5 million people who suffer daily as a result of the conflict. That is why France, alongside Germany, remains firmly committed to the Normandy format. France hosted a meeting of diplomatic advisers under that format on 12 July in Paris, marking the resumption of the proceedings and resulting in encouraging constructive exchanges. A set of priority measures to be taken by the parties in the coming weeks was agreed upon. It is now their

responsibility to ensure that they be translated into concrete actions.

It is also particularly necessary to make rapid progress in terms of prisoner exchanges, the last of which took place in December 2017, a ceasefire that is genuinely respected, improving the humanitarian situation, the withdrawal of heavy weaponry and mine clearance. Once the necessary legal framework has been established, democratic local elections will make it possible to implement the decentralization provisions provided for by the Minsk agreements.

To conclude, allow me to call for all of us here to be vigilant. Although encouraging, recent developments remain fragile. Current circumstances offer an opportunity to generate new, more positive and constructive momentum to revive the peace process. It is incumbent upon us all to seize the opportunity by taking the demanding path of dialogue and cooperation. The Minsk agreements will soon be 5 years old — it is high time that they be finally implemented.

Mr. Singer Weisinger (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): We wish to express our gratitude for the invitation to this meeting, as well as to Ms. DiCarlo and Mr. Zannier for their important briefings.

The Dominican Republic takes this opportunity to salute the new Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyi's inauguration. We welcome the pronouncements to prioritize the resolution of the conflict in the eastern region of his country. We wish him many successes in his Administration.

The Security Council and the international community received the Minsk agreements as an expression of the parties' legitimate interest in achieving a sustainable and lasting peace. However, more than four years after the signing of the agreements, we continue to witness ongoing violations of the ceasefire, the worrisome need for humanitarian assistance for civilians in the conflict zone, the alarmingly high number of people — around 4 million — affected by hunger and misery and the painful reality that more than 1.5 million internally displaced persons are still unable to return to their homes. Added to that are the constant unilateral measures that, in fact, do not contribute to moving the peace process forward.

We once again call on the parties to relax their positions and open the way to dialogue and to reaffirm their commitment to peace, multilateralism and the

peaceful settlement of disputes. The Dominican Republic urges the parties to ensure the collective interest and respect for human rights, guarantees and freedoms for all its inhabitants — for both those of the majority and those of the minority, including the rights and prerogatives relating to the language of the latter populations.

In the context of today's meeting, it is essential to act on an impartial assessment of the situation of minorities. To that end, we reiterate that it is necessary to maintain a dialogue with all the relevant parties. It is also necessary to move forward without delay towards a sustainable solution. To achieve that, the parties are called upon to refrain from any unilateral action that might hinder the process of implementing the agreements and complicate the efforts being made to build peace in the Ukrainian people and their surroundings.

In conclusion, the Dominican Republic reiterates its recognition of the unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. At the same time, we take this opportunity to highlight the continued efforts and customary support of the Organization and the international community to overcome the adversities suffered by the Ukrainian people in the midst of the conflict that has affected them for years. Accordingly, we call for the maintenance of conditions that allow for the continuation of the dialogue between the parties in the current Normandy format and the Trilateral Contact Group and insist on the full implementation of the Minsk agreements in order to put an end to the conflicts and restore international peace and security in Ukraine and the region.

Mr. Syhab (Indonesia): I wish first of all to thank Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo and High Commissioner Lamberto Zannier for their comprehensive briefings.

I would also like to congratulate the people of Ukraine on the inauguration of President Volodymyr Zelenskyi on 20 May. We wish the President and the people of Ukraine every success in navigating all the challenges faced by Ukraine on the road to peace and prosperity.

On many previous occasions, Indonesia has stated its position with regard to respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, as well as non-interference in its internal affairs. We have also reiterated the need for all parties to exercise restraint,

manage the crisis responsibly and uphold international law. We are of the view that it is crucial for all parties concerned to fully implement resolution 2202 (2015). Allow me to highlight the following points.

First, we fully respect Ukraine's national competence over the internal matters of the country, including the establishment of the status of the Ukrainian language as the country's national language, as stipulated in its law adopted on 15 May. As a country that comprises more than 300 ethnic groups, and with over 700 living languages spoken, Indonesia fully understands the unifying power of language, which is precisely the essence of language: to unite people instead of dividing them. That has always been our credo, and we hope that this spirit of inclusion, including respecting the rights of minorities, is always kept in mind to ensure a united society and lasting peace in Ukraine. We therefore take note and welcome the intention of President Zelenskyi to conduct a thorough analysis of the law to ensure that the constitutional rights and interests of Ukrainian citizens of all ethnicities, religions and backgrounds are fully respected.

Secondly, we cannot overemphasize the importance of implementing internationally agreed commitments. It is the responsibility of all sides to make good on their commitments as set out in the package of measures for the implementation of the Minsk agreements contained in resolution 2202 (2015). The full implementation of those commitments is essential to the peaceful resolution of the conflict and to avoiding further escalation thereof. We therefore urge all parties to demonstrate the necessary political will to ensure the end of the conflict and bring about peace and stability in Ukraine. All parties must cease resorting to actions that can be construed as detrimental to the implementation of the agreed commitments.

Thirdly, we commend and support the efforts of all parties, including the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Trilateral Contact Group, in facilitating and monitoring the implementation of the Minsk agreements. We urge all parties to support and ensure the implementation of the mandate of the OSCE and its effective engagement.

Lastly, allow me to reiterate that a sustainable solution to the crisis can be attained only through a genuine dialogue among the parties, supported by the United Nations and the international community. We fully support all constructive efforts aimed at peacefully

resolving the conflict in Ukraine, in accordance with international law and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo and High Commissioner Zannier for their briefings.

China has always held an objective and impartial position on the issue of Ukraine. We respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries, including Ukraine. China believes that all the parties concerned should fully implement resolution 2202 (2015) and the new Minsk agreements, remain committed to the overall direction of political settlement and actively seek a comprehensive, lasting and balanced solution to the Ukrainian issue.

The situation in Ukraine involves both complex historical and contemporary factors. China supports the parties concerned in their efforts to resolve their relevant differences quickly through dialogue and negotiations on the basis of taking into account and accommodating the legitimate concerns of all regions and ethnic groups in Ukraine so as to reach a final settlement that is acceptable to all parties.

The Security Council should play a constructive role and create a favourable external environment for the proper settlement of relevant issues, advancing peace, stability and development in Ukraine, promoting harmony among its various ethnic communities and enhancing peaceful coexistence between Ukraine and other countries in the region.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): I thank Mr. Zannier for his briefing.

When the Security Council decided not to hold a meeting on this issue on the day of President Zelenskyi's inauguration, the Russian Ambassador accused the Council of censorship. Well, there is no censorship. Here we are debating the issue. Back then, Russia was offered any other date it wanted, but it insisted that we had to meet on inauguration day. Which country around this table would not think that unnecessary, provocative and disrespectful if proposed in its region?

We are now at this meeting, as we said then that we would be, discussing Ukraine, and there should be no censorship. That is why I was surprised not to hear the Russian Ambassador explain why Russia continues to arm separatists in eastern Ukraine, why Russia refuses to implement the Minsk agreements, why it continues

to illegally detained 24 Ukrainian servicemen or why it persecutes the Tatar community in illegally annexed Crimea. Those are the issues that warrant continued discussion around this table.

Let me address Ukraine's policy on State language. It is important that we do so in the context of Russia's continued attempts to undermine Ukraine's independence. We reject the tenuous link Russia was drawn between the language law and the Minsk agreements, and call on Russia to live up to its responsibility to uphold international peace and security by implementing its Minsk commitments.

As we have heard, the bill on ensuring the functioning of Ukrainian as the State language, which was adopted by the Ukrainian Parliament on 25 April, is designed to reinforce the role of the Ukrainian language in public life. We note that the law requires the Ukrainian Parliament to pass further legislation on the realization of the rights of indigenous peoples and national minorities of Ukraine. We welcome the fact that the law requires the Ukrainian Parliament to pass further legislation to protect the rights of indigenous peoples and national minorities. Of course, we expect Ukraine to comply with its international obligations, including with respect to the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. I agree with Mr. Zannier that the language law should unite, not divide, a diverse society.

Ukrainians continue to suffer as a result of the Russian-fuelled conflict. Almost 13,000 people have lost their lives. Russia denies providing weaponry and personnel, but if it has nothing to hide, why does Russia and the separatists it backs block access for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission to the Ukraine-Russia border outside Ukrainian Government control? And why has Russia still failed to provide any explanation for the shooting down of a long-range unmanned aerial vehicle belonging to the Special Monitoring Mission in October last year on the border outside Ukrainian Government control? We call on Russia to play its part in ensuring that the security and humanitarian situation in eastern Ukraine is resolved.

Three months ago, the day after President Zelenskyi's overwhelming democratic election, Russia decided to make it easier for Ukrainian citizens living in eastern Ukraine to receive Russian citizenship. That

showed a clear disregard for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and runs counter to the spirit and objectives of the Minsk agreements. The United Kingdom supports the European Union's readiness to respond to that, including through the non-recognition of Russian passports issued in contradiction to the Minsk agreements. And I recall that it was on the pretext of protecting Russian citizens that Russia invaded Georgia. It is important that there be no such plan for Ukraine.

The United Kingdom welcomes President Zelenskyi's efforts to address the Ukraine crisis and stands ready to support his efforts to improve the humanitarian situation and bring peace to Donbas. We also continue to support the efforts of our partners with the Minsk process and are prepared to assist further as required. All parties have responsibilities under the Minsk agreements, and we expect to see the withdrawal of Russian personnel and weaponry supplied to Russian-backed separatists and the safe access, delivery and distribution of humanitarian assistance to those in need. I welcome the information provided to us by Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo about some of the recent improvements in that regard.

The situation in illegally annexed Crimea is desperate. We deplore the continued persecution of the Crimean Tatars, including the arbitrary arrest of 24 individuals in Simferopol in March. We call on Russia to immediately release all political prisoners and allow unrestricted access for human rights monitoring organizations. We further call on Russia to immediately release the 24 Ukrainian naval servicemen detained since 25 November, in line with the ruling of 25 May of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea.

Tomorrow marks the fifth anniversary of the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH-17, which resulting in the tragic deaths of the 298 people on board. The family and friends of those who died deserve justice. We welcome the indictment of four individuals accused of perpetrating those attacks, and we urge Russia to fully cooperate with the prosecution in accordance with resolution 2166 (2014).

The day after President Zelenskyi was overwhelmingly democratically elected, Russia introduced its new passport law. On the day President Zelenskyi was inaugurated, Russia tried and failed to hold a Security Council meeting to distract attention. Instead of that aggression, why does Russia not engage

with President Zelenskyi and lower tensions rather than stoke them in eastern Ukraine and withdraw from Ukrainian territory?

We want to engage in constructive dialogue with Russia on the issues that matter. But it is a matter of deep regret that, through its actions, Russia continues to violate the rules, norms and international law that we around this table are tasked with upholding. I urge Russia to choose an alternative path to the one it pursues today. But until it does, the international community must stand resolute in its opposition to Russia's continued attempts to destabilize and undermine Ukraine.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): Let me thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo and Mr. Lamberto Zannier for their contributions to today's briefing.

We strongly believe that the Russian aggression against Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity is a direct threat to international peace and security. At the same time, the Ukrainian legitimate authorities' adoption of a law is not. We would like to use this opportunity to underline a few facts about the current crisis in and around Ukraine, which has been provoked and deliberately fuelled by the Russian Federation since 2014.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Special Monitoring Mission regularly reports about ceasefire violations, explosions and incidents. The Monitoring Mission's observers are recording hundreds of ceasefire violations each day, including the deployment of weapons prohibited under the Minsk agreements. The overwhelming majority of ceasefire violations, illegal deployments and movement restrictions are committed by Russia-backed and -controlled illegal military formations in the areas of Donbas that are not controlled by the Ukrainian Government. We regret that the Russia-controlled armed formations continue to undermine the efficiency of the Special Monitoring Mission by restricting its freedom of movement, intimidating monitors and attacking the Mission's assets.

No one should ever doubt that Russia's attack against Ukraine in 2014 and its illegal annexation of Crimea was an act of aggression and a flagrant violation of the prohibition on the use of force. It was Russia that used a sham referendum to take over a part of a sovereign country, not Ukraine. Russian ships attacked vessels and captured their crew in the Kerch Strait. Again, that

was not Ukraine. In that regard, Ukraine has the right to promote its national language.

The list goes on and on: illegal elections in non-Government controlled areas of Ukraine in 2018, the introduction of the ruble zone and the official recognition of documents used by the illegal military bodies of certain parts of Donbas. How can one still try to equate the actions of both sides and call on both parties to show restraint and goodwill?

In May, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea ruled that Russia must immediately release vessels captured in the Kerch Strait and free the 24 servicemen. It has been nearly two months since the ruling and Russia continues to ignore the legally binding decision, offering instead to have the servicemen transferred and tried on Ukrainian soil according to Russian law, which is obviously unacceptable.

Despite Russia's failure to implement its security commitments, the Ukrainian Government has met a number of its political commitments — the President has signed a law on special status for Donbas, the Verkhovna Rada has passed an amnesty law and Ukraine has repeatedly called for an exchange of detainees. Lately, the Ukrainian side demonstrated its commitment to a constructive approach to achieve the conflict's resolution by initiating a withdrawal of its forces near Stanytsia Luhanska.

The response remains grim. Despite the progress achieved on disengagement in Stanytsia Luhanska, the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission still observes a Russian military presence in areas where there should be none. Moreover, the Russian Federation did not support the so-called harvest ceasefire suggested by Ukraine at the Trilateral Contact Group meeting. Further political steps — including local elections in Donbas, held under Ukrainian law — are impossible while parts of eastern Ukraine remain under Russia's control.

Russia continues its policy of flagrant disregard for the fundamental principles of international law with respect to Ukraine. Russia's actions continue to undermine the peace process, particularly the Minsk agreements of 2014 and 2015, which define the modalities for a permanent ceasefire and provide for Ukraine's reintegration of temporarily occupied territories.

During the previous Council meeting on this crisis in April (see S/PV.8516), Poland condemned Russia's decision to provide expedited Russian citizenship to

Ukrainian citizens living in the Russian-controlled areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine. It was the first and — most certainly — will not be the last challenge the Russian authorities pose to the new President of Ukraine. It is disappointing to see that Russia is not able to respond positively and constructively. Moscow can only continue its tactics of throwing logs to trip up other people.

Russia's continued fuelling of tensions in Donbas remains a direct challenge to international security, with grave implications for the international legal order that protects the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all States. The international community should neither accept nor recognize such a cascade of disregard for the fundamental principles of international law and should respond accordingly to Russia's unacceptable and illegal behaviour.

Last, but not least, I would like to draw the Council's attention to the upcoming fifth anniversary of the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH-17, which claimed the lives of 298 victims from 17 countries. We pay tribute to those who lost their lives and reassure the families of the victims that we will support the efforts of investigators to establish truth, justice and accountability for the downing of Flight MH-17. We call on all States, including the Russian Federation, to fully cooperate with efforts to establish accountability for the downing of Flight MH-17, in line with resolution 2166 (2014).

In conclusion, I once again underline Poland's unwavering support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): First, let me thank Ms. DiCarlo and Mr. Zannier for their briefings.

The State of Kuwait believes that all States have the right to adopt an official State language through their Constitutions. That is one of the most important elements supporting the existence and identity of the State. In that regard, the use of languages in Ukraine is provided for by its Constitution and regulated by law. Furthermore, article 10 of the Constitution provides that the official language of the State of Ukraine is Ukrainian. The State guarantees the development and use of the Ukrainian language in all aspects of social life throughout Ukrainian territory, despite the fact

that many provisions of the law entered into force on 16 July 2019.

Since the law provides for a transitional period of six months to 10 years for the implementation of some of its provisions. Both the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the High Commissioner on National Minorities of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe have provided advice to the Ukrainian authorities on language issues to ensure a balanced legislation that unite the diverse Ukrainian society. We hope that the relevant parties will implement those provisions and recommendation, which are likely to ease tensions.

On another level, we call on the two sides to show restraint and undertake all the measures necessary to de-escalate the situation, diffuse military tension in the Sea of Azov and commit to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. We also urge them to demonstrate the necessary political will to re-commit to the full implementation of the Minsk agreements in order to end the conflict and preserve peace and security in the region. We renew the call for dialogue as the best peaceful means to resolve disputes and conflicts no matter how diverse they might be, based on the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. Therefore, we also renew our appeal to the parties to engage seriously and in good faith in that dialogue to maintain the security and stability of the region and pursue a comprehensive and balanced solution to the issue through dialogue, as provided for in Article 33 of the Charter of the United Nations. In that regard, we call for enhanced dialogue between both parties and at all levels to lend greater momentum to the settlement of the dispute.

Moreover, we observe with concern the ongoing unstable situation in eastern Ukraine, now in its fifth year. The situation has had grave humanitarian and economic consequences for the daily lives of the people and for the infrastructure. More than 3.5 million out of a total of 5.2 million people need urgent humanitarian assistance, in addition to the 1.5 million internally displaced persons. We therefore urge both parties not to take any escalatory measures or steps that would fuel the conflict or obstruct the progress made in the implementation of Minsk agreements, which represent the only agreed framework for a settlement of the dispute within its regional scope.

In conclusion, we renew our commitment to the unity and sovereignty of Ukraine, as well as its territorial integrity inside its internationally recognized borders. We call for non-intervention in its internal affairs and express the hope that all the relevant parties will work to implement resolution 2202 (2015) and the Minsk peace agreements, including a full commitment to its package of measures.

Mr. Pecsteen de Buytsverve (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo and Mr. Lamberto Zannier for their insightful briefings.

The population of Ukraine has just elected a new President, Mr. Volodymyr Zelenskyi, through a democratic electoral process. The outgoing President, Mr. Poroshenko, has ensured a constructive transition. Those are two important achievements in a complex political, economic and security environment. In addition, Mr. Zelenskyi, has expressed openness towards the entire Ukrainian population, including zones not controlled by the Government. In recent days, Mr. Zelenskyi has reached out to the Russian Government to hold consultations. Belgium encourages Russia to participate constructively with the new President, and we call on the Russian authorities to consider this political momentum in Ukraine as an opportunity not to be missed.

The implementation of the Minsk agreements is the only way to achieve a lasting political solution to the conflict. Ukraine should, for example, take fully heed the Venice Commission's recommendations on the law on education, in accordance with its commitment, and the law on the use of languages should be in line with the obligations of the Minsk agreements. We therefore expect all parties to refrain from taking unilateral measures that could exacerbate tensions, to implement those agreements promptly and fully and to honour their commitments.

All actors must respect the ceasefire and uphold international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians and civilian structures. They have a responsibility to improve humanitarian access by ensuring the safety of humanitarian workers and removing bureaucratic obstacles. The parties must guarantee the freedom of movement of OSCE observers throughout Ukraine, including along the Ukrainian-Russian border and in Crimea. We are particularly concerned that the technical instruments of the

OSCE Mission are being targeted and blocked on an ongoing basis.

I take this opportunity to reaffirm our unwavering commitment to the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. We reiterate our support for the efforts of the Trilateral Contact Group, the OSCE and the Normandy format. We hope that the new President will continue on the path of the political and economic reforms that the country needs, particularly in the context of the implementation of the European Union Association Agreement. Belgium will continue to offer its support to that process, as well as to the Ukrainian people.

We reiterate our deepest concern over the escalation in the Kerch Strait and the Sea of Azov, as well as over Russia's violations of international law. In that regard, we regret that Russia has yet to comply with the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea's order, dating back to May 25. We call on Russia to uphold that legally binding decision and to release without delay the 24 military personnel captured in November 2018, as well as the three vessels.

We condemn any obstruction of navigation and free passage in the Kerch Strait. The militarization of Crimea and any illegal use of force could further destabilize the region and escalate tensions. We urge Russia to ensure free passage through the Sea of Azov without hindrance, in accordance with international maritime law.

As other colleagues have recalled, tomorrow will mark five years since Malaysia Airlines Flight MH-17 was shot down over the southern part of Ukraine. That tragic event claimed the lives of 298 people, including several Belgians. The Joint Investigation Team, of which Belgium is a member, recently made public the names of four suspects allegedly involved. Their identification does not end the investigation, and Belgium continues to call on all countries to lend their cooperation, in accordance with resolution 2166 (2014), so that all those responsible can be prosecuted and justice can be rendered in an independent, honest and transparent manner to the victims and their families.

Mr. Moriko (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation commends Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, and Mr. Lamberto Zannier, High Commissioner on National Minorities of the Organization for Security

and Cooperation in Europe, for their informative briefings on the entry into force on 15 July 2019 of the law establishing Ukrainian as the sole national language.

Whenever the Security Council has been seized of worrying developments in the situation in Ukraine and the region, Côte d'Ivoire has remained consistent in its call on all stakeholders in the crisis to exercise the utmost restraint and prioritize dialogue as a means of resolving their dispute. My country remains convinced that the lack of progress in the implementation of the Minsk agreements and the unilateral initiatives that exacerbate tensions reduce the prospects for a peaceful solution to the current crisis in Ukraine. In that especially volatile context, fuelled by a climate of mutual mistrust, Côte d'Ivoire reaffirms its conviction that lasting peace and stability will be possible only with ongoing dialogue that enables compromise among all parties.

In that respect, it welcomes the telephone interview on 11 July, which allowed Presidents Volodymyr Zelenskyi and Vladimir Putin to discuss a number of topics, including the situation in south-eastern Ukraine. Côte d'Ivoire would like to express its hope that the telephone exchange will pave the way for many more consultations between the two Presidents with a view to restoring the much-needed dialogue in the Normandy format, including its possible expansion.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire remains convinced that, despite the complexity of the current crisis, the restoration of peace and peaceful coexistence is possible in Ukraine. It is up to the political actors to work, through dialogue, towards achieving that noble aspiration in order to protect the entire region from a confrontation with disastrous humanitarian consequences.

Mrs. Mele Colifa (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): We join other members in expressing our thanks to Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo and Mr. Lamberto Zannier for the detailed briefings they have just delivered and of which we have taken careful note.

My delegation pays close attention to the situation in Ukraine, especially the complex crisis in the eastern part of the country. We believe that the crisis must be resolved politically in order to achieve the stabilization of the country and to strengthen and improve relations with the countries of the region. Given the complexity and fragility of the security, stability and development situation, which has yet to be resolved, we believe that the parties involved must show greater resolve

and willingness to improve the situation in the east of the country.

In that context, my delegation calls on the parties to exercise restraint in order to prevent certain actions and decisions from causing an escalation of the situation between them, leading to long-term consequences. We also encourage them to refrain from future actions that could aggravate and destabilize the situation, thereby undermining the efforts of the international community, including those of the Security Council, to seek a peaceful solution to the crisis. That is why we call for their cooperation to reduce tensions.

As it has reiterated on other occasions, the Government of Equatorial Guinea believes that the implementation of the Minsk agreements in their entirety remains essential to the restoration of peace and the achievement of stability in the region. We therefore regret the daily violations of the ceasefire, in direct breach of the Minsk agreements, and urge the parties to work towards a solution to the crisis in the eastern part of the country, taking into account the package of measures contained in that agreement.

We recall that the Minsk agreements, signed in February 2015 and ratified in resolution 2202 (2015), remain the foundation of the international community's commitment to the peaceful settlement of the conflict in Ukraine. We therefore encourage the parties to respect the full implementation of the agreements and to focus their efforts on facilitating an inclusive dialogue, in which the interests of all citizens prevail, that helps to strengthen harmonious relations among the various ethnic groups of Ukraine.

In conclusion, we once again commend the work of humanitarian actors in delivering humanitarian aid in the region in order to provide vital assistance. We also express our support for and welcome the efforts of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission, in particular to facilitate dialogue, as well as to maintain stability in the region. We encourage the parties to prioritize dialogue and to show greater political will in order to help to reduce tensions and find a lasting solution to the crisis.

Mr. Mabhongo (South Africa): At the outset, we wish to thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo and High Commissioner Zannier for their briefings today.

With regard to the matter brought to the attention of this meeting, South Africa continues to encourage

all the parties to strengthen all diplomatic efforts so as to avoid an escalation of tensions and work towards an inclusive, sustainable and peaceful solution based on cooperation and genuine dialogue. It is also of critical importance that all the parties refrain from actions that could be viewed as provocative, which may further impede a peaceful resolution of the situation.

Non-implementation of existing agreements leads to unintended consequences. We wish to reiterate the necessity for all the parties to fully implement all their respective commitments under the Minsk agreements, which provide the most promising road map for the peaceful settlement of the current hostilities, including in eastern Ukraine, and to advance the cause of peace and stability in the wider region.

In conclusion, we encourage all parties to approach dialogue in the spirit of compromise in order to move the process forward.

Mr. Heusgen (Germany): Let me start on a positive note, namely, that Russia and Mr. Nebenzia's intervention today insisted that we should not populate the issue of the language law with other topics. That is positive because, from our perspective, the adoption or the discussion of a language law does not really constitute a threat to peace and security and does not need to be discussed in the Security Council. I see a very positive shift in the position of Russia, which until now has always insisted that questions that are not directly related to peace and security or to human rights issues be discussed in Geneva. So we welcome that.

Regarding the law itself, we agree with what Mr. Zannier said, namely, that a language law should unite, not divide, a people. We welcome the signals that have been sent out by the new Ukrainian President.

As Russia highlighted human rights issues, Germany would like to do the same. We would like to recall today the treatment of minorities in occupied Crimea. The Crimean media and organizations are banned. There is a recent Human Rights Watch report that Crimean Tatars are targeted, arrested and prosecuted without any evidence. We would appeal to the Russian authorities that they respect the fundamental rights, the freedoms of opinion, expression and association and the religion of minorities. The backdrop, of course — what is going on in Crimea — is the blatant violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity through Russia's illegal occupation of Crimea.

Talking about human rights, and Russia mentioned this, what is being done to compensate the families of the victims of Flight MH-17 — 298 men, women and children, who lost their lives after having been shot down by Russian weapons. A gesture by Russia tomorrow on the fifth anniversary of the shooting down would be very welcome. As the Security Council, we recently visited Colombia and we all witnessed the so-called truth commission. Why not have a truth commission and find out what happened there so that the family members of the victims learn the truth about the shooting down of Flight MH-17? What about the victims of the ongoing violation of the ceasefire? When Russia talks about the implementation of the Minsk agreements, the first and most important paragraph of the Minsk agreements was a ceasefire. There continues to be a violation of the Minsk agreements. We see that the heavy weapons have not been withdrawn. I would also like to mention the unacceptable attack on a Ukrainian medical vehicle on 1 July, in which there were three casualties.

With regard to human rights, there are 24 detained Ukrainian servicemen. Such detention violates international law. For Germany, respect for international law and international court rulings is fundamental in an international rules-based order. I could add elements but refer to what my French, Belgian, United Kingdom and Polish colleagues said. There is a new President in Ukraine. The President clearly said that he wanted to overcome the stalemate. He has made gestures, one of which the German delegation has raised at each and every discussion in the Security Council, that is, with regard to the bridge at Stanytsia Luhanska. Right away the President unilaterally withdrew. He is ready to rebuild the bridge. We need such a gesture from Russia to echo Ukraine's gestures and to alleviate the situation for the citizens because it is the only connection between the occupied area around Luhansk and the rest of Ukraine.

Germany remains committed to the Normandy format. There was a good meeting of the advisers. We hope that the new spirit that has been brought about by the new President in Ukraine prevails and that we will now see progress on the implementation of the Minsk agreements.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Peru.

We thank this morning's briefers — Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo and Mr. Lamberto Zannier — for their briefings. I will begin by welcoming the recent decision of the Russian and Ukrainian Presidents to resume talks under the Normandy format and to continue working at the expert level, including with a view to a prisoner exchange in the near future.

In line with the principle of the peaceful settlement of disputes, Peru recognizes and supports the efforts of the Normandy format and the Trilateral Contact Group to facilitate a political solution to the situation in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. In that regard, we believe that both countries should capitalize on those opportunities and mechanisms to promote dialogue, while refraining from actions that exacerbate tensions and hinder the possibilities for dialogue between the parties.

In that regard, we took note of the entry into force of the law to strengthen the use of the Ukrainian language, and we express our concern that the rights of linguistic minorities in the country, such as those in Donbas, may be affected. Similarly, we also express our concern about the Russian executive order to expeditiously grant Russian nationality to residents of those regions, given that they are controlled by separatist groups.

Therefore, in line with the decision of the Presidents of both countries, we call on all parties and actors involved to work together with a view to promoting trust and dialogue and to step up the full implementation of the Minsk agreements, starting with the ceasefire commitment.

For Peru, the Minsk agreements remain the legal basis for and the political solution to the situation in eastern Ukraine, and we support the package of measures and its full implementation endorsed by the Council more than four years ago. In that regard, we take this opportunity to welcome the decision by both parties to withdraw their troops and artillery from the Stanytsia Luhanska area, which also helps address the serious humanitarian situation. We acknowledge the important work and efforts of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in carrying out that task.

In conclusion, I reiterate our commitment to the independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine within internationally recognized borders, in line with the Charter of the United Nations and the Minsk agreements.

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

I give the floor to the representative of Ukraine.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): First of all, I thank the members of the Security Council, as well as the briefers, for their remarks. We have taken good note of them.

Nearly two months ago, on 20 May, the Security Council clearly stated its position on the Russian request to discuss Ukraine's language law by rejecting it (see S/PV.8529). At that time, the Russian representative, however, demonstrated outrageous disrespect for the Council's rules and its members by abusing its right to speak in explanation of vote and delivering a lengthy statement on substance.

Now Russia yet again wants to talk about Ukraine's law on the functioning of Ukrainian as the State language, as if it might threaten international peace and security and as if there were no more important issue on the Council agenda. In fact, this matter has no relation whatsoever to international peace and security and has nothing to do with the implementation of resolution 2202 (2015).

On 22 May, I sent a letter to the Council with a detailed argumentation of the issue, contained in document S/2019/422, which I cite for the convenience of Council members. I just want to stress the following.

A country that, for centuries, suppressed the Ukrainian language and forcefully replaced it with Russian in all spheres of public life is not in a position to tell us now what language we should speak and write. Let us compare. There are Ukrainian schools in Australia, Argentina, Slovakia and many other countries. Russia, where about 3 million Ukrainians live — that is according only to the official count, but unofficially many more live there — does not have a single Ukrainian school. Moreover, there were seven Ukrainian and 15 Crimean Tatar schools in Crimea before the Russian occupation in 2014. The occupying authorities closed all Ukrainian schools and half of the Crimean Tatar schools. I can only repeat the words from the Sermon on the Mount:

“Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.” (*The Holy Bible*, Matthew, 7:5)

As far as our language law is concerned, let me say once again that is our own issue subject to our own work, and we will sort it out ourselves with the help of our partners, including the High Commissioner on National Minorities, the Venice Commission and other relevant international institutions.

Every time the Russian delegation raises this subject, it pursues a double goal — to put political pressure on Ukraine and to distract attention from other issues. In May, it tried to impose its own agenda on the newly elected President of Ukraine, who was inaugurated the very same day, and to distract attention from the anniversary of the deportation of Crimean Tatars by the Stalin regime.

Today, by raising this spurious issue four days before the parliamentary elections in Ukraine, Moscow is trying to provide political support to the pro-Russian parties. At the same time, Moscow is trying to divert attention from the anniversary of the downing by the Russian military of flight MH-17 on 17 July 2014 and from the implementation of the Minsk agreements, or, to be more precise, their persistent non-implementation by Russia. That is why my delegation requested that the Security Council consider developments related to the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict, and we are thankful for today's discussion.

This is the first Council meeting on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict after the presidential elections in Ukraine. I therefore would like to reiterate the unwavering commitment of Ukraine's new leadership to the politico-diplomatic way of resolving the conflict. The implementation of the Minsk agreements remains among its top priorities.

Right after assuming his duties as Head of State, President Zelenskyi took concrete steps towards ensuring the potency of the Trilateral Contact Group, the revitalization of the Normandy format and achieving the disengagement of forces in Donbas. Thus, the Ukrainian side has demonstrated in deed its constructive approach in search of the conflict's resolution. What have we received in return?

Despite the agreement reached by the Trilateral Contact Group on the ceasefire starting on 8 March, the Russian occupation forces in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions have violated it almost 2,000 times. Heavy weapons, prohibited by the Minsk agreements, including tanks, heavy artillery and mortars, have been used almost 800 times. Those provocations have

resulted in the death of 36 Ukrainian servicemen. Approximately 200 servicemen have been wounded. In June alone, Ukraine lost nine military personnel owing to unprovoked enemy fire.

Since the new President took office, the Russian forces and their proxies have almost doubled their ceasefire violations. Is that what Russian peace proposals look like? The Russian forces intentionally target civilian infrastructure facilities throughout the area. Is that an invitation to the direct talks that the Russian Federation persistently calls for? Detailed information on all such violations has been regularly reported by the Special Monitoring Mission of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) for five years, but the Russian delegation prefers to talk here about the language law.

The situation on the ground appears very bleak, as Russia shows no indication of readiness to abandon its aggressive goals in Ukraine. The implementation of the Minsk agreements by the Kremlin, first and foremost in the security sphere, remains stalled. The illegal “passportization” continues. The security situation in Donbas continues to deteriorate. The de-occupation of Crimea has not started. Ukrainian citizens continue to be used as hostages by Moscow in its hybrid war against my country. The Charter of the United Nations, the norms of international law and the binding orders of international courts and tribunals remain dead letter for the Russian Federation, which keeps denying that it is a party to the conflict that it masterminded, initiated and continues to fuel.

Let us return to the Minsk agreements, namely, to the package of measures of 12 February 2015, on which Ambassador Nebenzia so enjoys lecturing the members of the Council.

With regard to paragraph 1 on an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire (see resolution 2202 (2015), annex), recently, the Russian forces intensified the shelling of Ukrainian military positions and residential areas, using 122-millimetre and 152-millimetre heavy artillery. On 1 July, an ambulance, bearing every indication of medical transport, was targeted by the Russian occupation forces with an anti-tank rocket. As a result, two Ukrainian medics evacuating a wounded soldier near the village of Vodyane were killed, and one died later in the hospital. Did the militants not know that shelling a medical vehicle is a violation of the norms of international humanitarian law? Of course they knew,

and the Russian delegation still wants to discuss the use of Ukrainian language in the public life of my country. For those who have forgotten, I will cite paragraph 1 of resolution 2286 (2016):

“[The Security Council] strongly condemns acts of violence, attacks and threats against the wounded and sick, medical personnel and humanitarian personnel exclusively engaged in medical duties, their means of transport and equipment”.

The Russian delegation persistently asserts that Moscow has no obligations under the Minsk agreements and that it is only an impartial observer and mediator. Let us inject a dose of reality into those delirious claims. The 1st and 2nd Army Corps that constitute the main fighting force in the occupied territories of Donbas are part and parcel of Russia’s 8th Army, which has its headquarters in Novochoerkask, in the Rostov region of Russia. All weapons, arms, ammunition, equipment and fuel are supplied to the occupied Donbas courtesy of the 8th Army. All command posts of any significance are occupied by Russian officers. Therefore, the responsibility for upholding any ceasefire agreement rests with the Russian military leadership and not some fictitious local militias. The Russian military presence and active participation in the war is an established fact, no matter how strenuously Russia may try to deny it.

With regard to paragraph 2 of the package of measures for the implementation of the Minsk agreements, related to the withdrawal of all heavy weapons with the aim of creating a security zone, the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission continues to report weapons in violation of the respective withdrawal lines and outside of designated storage sites in the Russian-occupied territories of Donbas and a constant replenishment of fuel, lubricants and ammunition. Hundreds of pieces of Russian heavy weapons continue to pose a direct and serious military threat to Ukraine and its defenders. Much more remains hidden from the Mission’s eyes.

With respect to paragraph 3 of the package of measures, related to the effective monitoring and verification by the OSCE of the ceasefire regime and the pull-out of heavy weapons, as reported by the Special Monitoring Mission, the Russian occupation authorities restrict the activities of the monitors, including by denying access of the Mission to border crossing points in the occupied parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

Concerning paragraph 10 of the package of measures, related to the withdrawal of all foreign armed formations, military equipment and mercenaries from the territory of Ukraine under the monitoring of the OSCE, reports from Donbas confirm that there has been no withdrawal whatsoever. Instead, we see a systematic and incessant flow of Russian-made weapons, including the newest types, and ammunition through the uncontrolled segment of the Ukrainian-Russian State border.

Which of the security provisions of the Minsk agreements can be considered to have been implemented by Russia? None. Not a single one. Despite the progress made on disengagement in Stanytsia Luhanska, the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission still observes a Russian military presence in areas where there should be none. The OSCE Mission has reported men in military-style clothing, who were illegally wearing blue armbands with “Joint Centre for Control and Coordination” (JCCC) written on them. We consider such actions by the Russian side to be yet another provocation, since, as of the end of 2017, only the Ukrainian part of the JCCC has continued to discharge its duties on site. As has already been mentioned in the Council at previous meetings, the Russian Federation has unilaterally and groundlessly withdrawn its officers from the bilateral structure. No one is authorized to replace them.

Despite ample proof of Russia’s aggression against Ukraine in Donbas, it remains in denial. That is Moscow’s usual tactic — to deny the obvious, despite any evidence. It is the same way it denied the presence of its troops in Crimea and its role in seizing the peninsula. It is the same way it denied its role in the downing of Malaysian Airlines Flight MH-17, which killed almost 300 passengers. Tomorrow will mark five years since that tragedy. I would again like to convey Ukraine’s deepest condolences to the families of all of the victims and reassure them that the perpetrators must and will be held to account, in compliance with resolution 2166 (2014).

Ukraine fully supports the efforts by the Joint Investigation Team, which includes investigators and prosecutors from the Netherlands, Australia, Belgium, Malaysia and Ukraine. The start of criminal prosecution is an important milestone in uncovering the full truth and ensuring that justice will be done. We welcome the decision of the Netherlands and Australia to hold the

Russian Federation responsible under international law for its role in the downing of flight MH-17.

Let me also remind the Council of an event that took place on 25 November last year, when Russia attacked and captured the Ukrainian navy ships *Berdyansk* and *Nikopol* and the tugboat *Yana Kapu*, as well as 24 Ukrainian servicemen. That was nothing more than another act of aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. It was a blatant violation of the core principle of customary international law and international law of the sea — the immunity of warships. Russia overtly neglects warship immunity and creates a dangerous precedent that irreparably harms the whole system of the freedom of navigation on the high seas.

Russia has continued to deny that international wrongful act, but today it has gone even further. It denies the jurisdiction of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) and ignores its binding orders. On 25 May, ITLOS ruled in the *Case concerning the detention of three Ukrainian naval vessels (Ukraine v. Russian Federation)* by 19 votes to 1 that Russia should immediately release the three vessels and ensure their return to the custody of Ukraine, and release its 24 servicemen and allow them to return to Ukraine. Russia has not implemented it.

We do not know the condition of those military vessels. We do know the situation with the 24 servicemen of those vessels. They are in a Russian prison — the infamous Lefortovo. They are very rarely allowed to be visited by the Ukrainian Consul and have not seen their families for more than seven months. Tomorrow, a Russian court will consider the continuation of the detention of the 24 Ukrainian servicemen. We call on the Russian Federation to comply, at last, with the binding orders of ITLOS, release the Ukrainian sailors and let them return to Ukraine.

Russia’s general disregard for international law is obvious as the Russian occupation administration intensifies its repression of residents of Crimea under the pretext of fighting terrorism. That is how Russia reacts to hearings, which now take place at the International Court of Justice, on the application of the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism and of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and the Arbitral Tribunal in the matter of the *Dispute Concerning Coastal State Rights in the*

Black Sea, Sea of Azov, and the Kerch Strait (Ukraine v. the Russian Federation).

The Russian occupation authorities continue to deny proper medical assistance to Ukrainian citizens in detention. They ignore the decision of the European Court of Human Rights of 11 June and refuse to transfer disabled Crimean Tatar Edem Bekirov to a hospital. Russia must immediately and unconditionally release all Ukrainian citizens illegally held by the Kremlin, including in the Russian-occupied parts of Ukraine. Until then, they must be given all necessary medical assistance and legal protection.

Russia's blatant disrespect of international jurisdictional bodies should receive an appropriate response. We call for the strengthening of political and economic sanctions on the aggressor State until Russia stops violating human rights in the temporarily occupied Crimea, releases all illegally detained citizens of Ukraine and de-occupies the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol.

I do not have a recipe for a political settlement to the conflict. Various ideas and initiatives have been introduced to provide additional impetus. None of them has worked so far. People are still being killed, ceasefires do not hold and the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate. The best the Council can do today is to express concern or call on the parties to do something. That is very unfortunate, particularly as the parties are present in the Chamber, even though one of them pretends it is not a party.

Let us be practical. I would like to suggest very specific, simple and doable measures that Russia can implement, if Moscow really wishes to contribute to the resolution of the conflict and make the lives of civilians in the conflict zone at least a little bit easier.

First, it must ensure that the so-called harvest ceasefire, which was agreed by the Normandy Four, is sustained and withdraw heavy weaponry. Secondly, it should unblock the process of prisoner exchange, including in relation to the Ukrainian citizens detained by the Russian occupation authorities; provide access to them, including by the International Committee of the Red Cross; and allow searches for missing persons. Thirdly, it must unconditionally release the 24 Ukrainian servicemen, as ordered by the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea. Fourthly, it must withdraw its military from the disengagement area and dismantle its

fortification structures there. Fifthly, it should agree on the opening of additional crossing checkpoints.

Of course, this is a very short list and I could go on and on naming relevant measures. But we must start somewhere. Let us make a difference. As the famous Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu said, centuries ago: "A journey of thousand miles begins with a single step."

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The representative of the Russian Federation has asked to make a further statement.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I should indeed like to comment on the remarks made by certain colleagues in their statements.

I will begin with my friend, Ambassador Heusgen. I do not know who told him what I said, but the way he interpreted my statement makes it clear that it was restated in an inaccurate manner. I can repeat my statement for him personally later, should he so wish.

However, I will not dignify my British colleague with a response to his numerous questions. This is due not to a lack of respect for my colleague, but to the simple fact that he does not need these responses. He lives within his own paradigm and those questions he has put forward are, for him, rhetorical. They also contain the responses that he wishes to hear and therefore he has no need for other answers. Incidentally, I have proposed that my British colleague visit Crimea personally and take a look at the so-called suffering of Crimeans, including Crimean Tatars, so that he can draw his own conclusions, rather than read out the narrative that is duly provided to him by the British Foreign Office.

Incidentally, in Crimea it would be possible to familiarize oneself with the educational system in three State languages: Russian, Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar, which our American colleague was so concerned about today. Not a word, however, was said about the topic of today's meeting and in no way did he even comment on the words of the High Commissioner on National Minorities, who indeed provided a great deal of interesting information.

We assumed that a number of Council members would do everything possible to avoid discussion of the topic at hand today. They raised many issues, but not what we proposed to be put forward for discussion. This is truly no surprise to us. We have long attempted to convey to the Council that the picture members are painting in their imagination, which is duly being

delivered to them by the Ukrainian authorities about freedom-loving, democratic Ukraine engaged in an uneven struggle with a brutal aggressor, has nothing to do with reality.

They do not see that the reality of the situation is, in fact, straight out of their imagination or rather the myth that they have created for themselves; more accurately, perhaps they simply do not wish to see it. They do not wish to understand that their indulgence towards Kyiv prompts a feeling of lawlessness, all-permissiveness and impunity. They do not wish to hear that what is really happening in Ukraine is the enmity and hostility being cultivated in society vis-à-vis Russia. I will offer three brief examples to illustrate that.

The Ukrainian television channel News One announced a television broadcast and a link with Russia One. Ordinary citizens, not politicians, were tracked to an unprecedented level by nationalists with the connivance of the authorities. Information surfaced yesterday that the general producer of the channel was questioned by the Ukrainian security forces as part of “a criminal affair on encroachment upon on a state offence or treason” — all this for an attempt to set up a television broadcast. The building of the Ukrainian channel 112 Ukraine was fired on with mortars in the centre of Kyiv for its plans to screen the documentary *Revealing Ukraine*, by Oliver Stone, a well-known United States director. This mortar attack was denounced by the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine, who claimed that a war was being waged in Ukraine against journalists and mass media. Dmytro Yarosh, the former head of the Right Sector party and a deputy from the outgoing Rada, recommended that workers of television channels quit and that all those concerned about violations of human rights and freedom of speech should shut their mouth.

Kyryl Vyshinsky, head of RIA Novosti Ukraine, has been behind bars for a year now. He is accused of State treason for some reports he delivered. These instances and examples abound. I can list many, but members of the Council — at least, many of them — simply do not wish to hear it.

We regret the fact that some have been unable to resist the temptation to use today’s meeting in order to capitalize on the sensitive issue of the disaster of the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH-17 in Ukraine in July 2014. On the eve of the fifth anniversary of this tragedy, we once again extend our most sincere

condolences to the families of the dead. We believe that every family deserves to know the truth about what really occurred on that unfortunate day. For that reason, from the very beginning we have called for a thorough and impartial international investigation in line with resolution 2166 (2014) and have repeatedly stressed our willingness to join and to deliver the necessary support.

Unfortunately, we cannot trust the actions of the Joint Investigation Team, which is comprised of Australia, Belgium, the Netherlands, Malaysia and Ukraine itself, to be impartial. Questions regarding the proceedings of the work surfaced right after four out of five States, on 7 August 2014, signed a confidential agreement that enabled the filtering of any information. Malaysia had long been denied an opportunity to fully participate in the investigation. I do not know whether the Council has heard that the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mahathir Mohamad, at a meeting with journalists on 30 May, cast doubt on the outcomes or the result of the work of the group. We concur with his opinion that there is an impression that the purpose of the investigation is not to shed light on the circumstances of what took place but rather to pin all blame on the Russian Federation.

Incidentally, I am surprised that the statement delivered by my friend Ambassador Heusgen, who referred to international law and demonstrated an incredible level of legal nihilism, calling upon the Russian Federation to pay compensation for the victims when there have been no judicial proceedings and no one has yet been identified as the culprit. I wish to recall the fact that, in October 2016, we conveyed the initial unredacted radar data and remain the only ones to have done so.

Regarding flight MH-17, I would like to ask our United States colleague about the whereabouts of the satellite images from United States satellites over the crash site that have long been spoken of and which the United States has refused to provide. At a recent press conference, on 19 June, the representatives of the Joint Investigation Team were unable to answer the question of why Russian data was not taken into account but the data of other countries was not even provided, just as they were unable to say why they had disregarded the fact that the rocket that allegedly downed the Boeing had come from the Ukrainian armed forces, when that fact had been established by the Russian side after the Joint Investigation Team itself displayed fragments of

that rocket. The politicization of this Group is to us completely evident.

I will not speak in depth about the incident in the Kerch Strait. I would simply say — I do not know whether Council members are aware of this or not — that Russia proposed releasing those sailors to return to Ukraine provided that they consented to participate in criminal proceedings to take place in the Russian Federation. This idea was immediately rejected by Ukraine's Foreign Minister and, by the way, subsequently questioned and called into doubt by President Zelenskyi.

I will not talk about that, but I will read out a single quotation about how the day before the inauguration of the President, the former Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration, Andriy Portnov, filed a complaint with the State Bureau of Investigation in relation to actions by former President Poroshenko in connection with that incident:

“The aforementioned instances were the result of planned illegal actions by an individual who at the time occupied the post of President of Ukraine and was the senior military commander of the country's armed forces. In other words, as part of an organized group of individuals having full information about the tensions in the Kerch Strait, aware of the likelihood the Russian Federation's armed forces would undertake aggressive action, and fully understanding the risks to the life, health and freedom of Ukrainian servicemen as well as potential damages and loss of military equipment and weapons stemming from his actions, President Poroshenko deliberately instructed or consented to the instruction ordering a group of naval vessels belonging to the Ukrainian armed forces to be transferred from the Black Sea to the Sea of Azov through the Kerch Strait, which was fully under the control of the Russian naval forces.”

In conclusion, I wish to tell my Ukrainian colleague the following. My Ukrainian colleague used the well-known tactic of twisting notions that the Ukrainian side has long favoured. It is as if he were not at the meeting commemorating the Minsk agreements when the question concerning the presence of Russian troops in Donbas was answered, not by us but by the representatives of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. We remember very well what they said in this regard.

Nevertheless, the Ukrainian side is obstinately using the term “Russian militants”. They can of course be Russian — there are many Russians in Ukraine — but they are in fact representatives of the Donbas region and not of the Russian Federation. Incidentally, he forgot to mention how many civilians in Donbas, Luhansk and Donetsk died as a result of the shelling by the valiant and knightly Ukrainian forces. I wish to stress that these were civilians. I would like to reiterate for the Council's understanding that it was not Donbas that marched on Kyiv, but Kyiv that came to Donbas.

I will not continue to describe the way Ukraine has been sabotaging the Minsk agreements. Earlier, the representative of Ukraine proposed measures that need to be adopted to begin to resolve the conflict, but he spoke to the Russian side, again resorting to the tactic of twisting notions. We have said, we are saying and we will continue to say that until the Ukrainian side engages in direct dialogue with representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk — not with Russia — there will be no progress in this conflict.

I have asked this many times in this Chamber: Why is it that when we discuss other conflicts that have unfortunately engulfed the world — the Syrian, Yemeni or Libyan conflicts, or indeed any other conflict — we call on the parties to the conflict to sit down at the negotiating table and we do not allege that external players supplant those parties to the conflict. It is only in the case of Ukraine that many Council members are obstinately attempting to make Russia speak to Ukraine rather than to those individuals in Donbas, Donetsk and Luhansk who are the direct parties to this confrontation.

Lastly, the representative of Ukraine mentioned that we are instructing the Ukrainians on what language needs to be spoken in Ukraine. We are not giving any such instructions. This is Ukraine's law, which instructs its citizens as to what languages they are allowed to speak and what languages they are not allowed to speak.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The representative of Ukraine has asked to make a further statement.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine) (*spoke in Russian*): To show respect to my Russian colleague, Mr. Vassily Nebenzia, I have chosen to speak in Russian, especially since it would seem to be appropriate in the light of his fabricated topic for today's meeting. I will be very brief.

The second statement delivered by Mr. Nebenzia bore out my gravest concerns, namely, that once again he has confused a Security Council meeting with a talk show — a very popular talk show in the Russian

Federation called *60 Minutes*, with Olga Skabeeva. But today's meeting is not a talk show.

The meeting rose at 12.10 p.m..