Delegation of the Russian Federation

STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1088th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL

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On manifestations of aggressive nationalism in Ukraine

Mr. Chairperson,

The excesses of the nationalists, who encounter virtually no opposition on the part of the authorities, are continuing in Ukraine. What is more, many nationalist elements have actually been integrated into the power structures. These are objective facts from Ukrainian human rights organizations and voluntary associations.

Recently, on 19 January 2016, during a rally in Kyiv in memory of the Russian human rights activists, Stanislav Markelov and Anastasia Baburova, demonstrators were subjected to aggressive attacks by some fifty fighters from the Azov battalion, which is officially a unit of the Ukrainian Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The day before, right-wing extremists had beaten up the editor of Commons: Journal of Social Criticism, Artem Tidva. Human rights advocates have already asked the Minister of Internal Affairs, Arsen Avakov, whether the perpetrators actually belong to the Azov battalion.

At a press conference held two days later, a group of Ukrainian human rights advocates admitted that there are fascists in Ukraine who are ready to fight with those who disagree with them using any means whatsoever, and even violence. True to form, the Azov battalion fighters present at that press conference had done all they could to prevent it from taking place.

According to the Ukrainian Centre for Social and Labour Research, ultranationalists are increasingly becoming a source of violence in the country. For example, between April and September 2015, they were involved in 85 protests, almost a quarter of which were violent, and 9 resulted in casualties.

There is every reason to talk about a radicalization of far-right events – the proportion of violent actions increased from 15 per cent in 2014 to 23 per cent in 2015. Right Sector topped the crime list in 2014 and 2015 and is the most active in this regard. It is involved in

more than half of such actions. Between April and September 2015, volunteer battalions, in particular Aidar, Azov and Sich, took part in ten violent nationalist protests.

During the first six months of 2015, right-wing extremists stamped out peaceful anti-government demonstrations on 21 occasions, with fighters from the Aidar, Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and East Corps volunteer battalions resorting to punitive measures on 9 occasions. There have been dozens of repressive operations by radicals against the opposition. Nationalists, most often Right Sector, have been interfering in the work of journalists, international observers, volunteers and law enforcement authorities.

We have already raised the question here of nationalist involvement in seizing places of worship belonging to the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Detailed material has been circulated on this topic. The situation is yet to improve. On 29 January 2016, at a meeting of the Council of Bishops of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Kyiv Pechersk Lavra, it was noted that by the end of 2015 there had been 31 cases on record of Orthodox places of worship being seized, while 12 parishes remain at risk. The conflict surrounding the church in the village of Ptycha in the Rivne region continues. The leader of the Rivne branch of Right Sector, Roman Koval, declared that all places of worship in the Dubno district would be seized if the Ukrainian Orthodox Church community did not abandon its parish in Ptycha.

Ukrainian nationalism has always been associated with anti-Semitism, as exemplified by the desecration of Holocaust memorials and attacks on Jews. On 29 January 2016, ultranationalists held torchlight processions in a number of cities. Monuments connected with the history of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic continue to be destroyed.

The nationalists are never seen more clearly than in the atrocities committed by volunteers and the Ukrainian army against civilians in the south-east of the country, frequently under the banner of neo-Nazi symbols and slogans. We are talking here about war crimes and crimes against humanity. This is something that has been reported by many international human rights organizations.

Human rights advocates believe that the increased activity of radicals in Ukraine is occurring with the full connivance of the authorities and amid widespread impunity for the guilty parties. The sorry outcome of the official investigation into the tragedy at Trade Union House in Odessa on 2 May 2014, which was the work of Right Sector fighters, is most illustrative of this fact. As you are aware, no charges have been brought against a host of people who were actively involved in those events, which resulted in 48 people being burned to death. A great deal of evidence about the fire has been destroyed, and the investigation is being carried out in such a way that it is unlikely to establish the truth. As the Human Rights Watch report published on 27 January 2016 says: "Law enforcement bodies have been either unable or unwilling to bring many of those responsible to justice." It is a similar situation to that of the "sniper incident" on the Maidan.

According to experts, the main reasons for the upsurge in far-right violence are the glorification of radicals and their role in the war in Donbas in the local media, the celebration of the Nazi, Banderist past, the inability of the law enforcement agencies to protect people against attacks, the infiltration of the country's power structures and law enforcement system by nationalists, and their growing dissatisfaction with the policies of the authorities which are alleged to have "betrayed the Maidan ideals".

We call on the Ukrainian authorities to put an end to the ultranationalist rampage and ensure genuine rule of law in the country in accordance with Ukraine's international commitments. We also call on the United States of America, the European Union and Canada, which are supporting the Ukrainian Government, to stop actually condoning crimes by radicals in Ukraine.

Thank you for your attention.