



# Security Council

Seventy-fourth year

**8516<sup>th</sup>** meeting

Thursday, 25 April 2019, 3 p.m.

New York

*Provisional*

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*President:* Mr. Heusgen . . . . . (Germany)

*Members:*

Belgium . . . . .	Mrs. Van Vlierberge
China . . . . .	Mr. Wu Haitao
Côte d'Ivoire . . . . .	Mr. Ipo
Dominican Republic . . . . .	Mr. Trullols Yabra
Equatorial Guinea . . . . .	Mr. Ndong Mba
France . . . . .	Mr. Delattre
Indonesia . . . . .	Mr. Syihab
Kuwait . . . . .	Mr. Albanai
Peru . . . . .	Mr. Ugarelli
Poland . . . . .	Mr. Lewicki
Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Nebenzia
South Africa . . . . .	Mrs. Tshabalala
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Allen
United States of America . . . . .	Mr. Cohen

## Agenda

Letter dated 28 February 2014 from the Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2014/136)

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*The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.*

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

### **Letter dated 28 February 2014 from the Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2014/136)**

**The President:** 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; Ms. Ursula Mueller, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator; His Excellency Mr. Ertuğrul Apakan, Chief Monitor of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine; and His Excellency Mr. Martin Sajdik, Special Representative of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine and in the Trilateral Contact Group.

Mr. Apakan and Mr. Sajdik are joining the meeting via video-teleconference from Kyiv.

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

I give the floor to Ms. DiCarlo.

**Ms. DiCarlo:** On 21 April, millions of Ukrainians exercised their democratic right to choose their next President. We commend the Ukrainian people on the peaceful conduct of the election and take note of the assessment of the electoral process by the international and domestic observer groups, including the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The United Nations, including through its presence in Ukraine, is committed to continuing to work with the Ukrainian authorities and the people of Ukraine, in particular to support the provision of humanitarian assistance, the promotion and safeguarding of human rights and the country's critical reform process.

The recent election took place in the shadow of the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine, many of whose residents were unable to exercise their democratic rights and continue to face the daily challenges associated with an active conflict. A lasting and durable ceasefire remains an urgent priority. In that regard, we regret the inconclusive discussions on a new ceasefire recommitment on the occasion of Orthodox Easter during yesterday's meeting of the Trilateral Contact Group in Minsk. We commend the efforts of the OSCE representatives and join their calls for agreement without delay on this important issue. We also want to point out that 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.

Assistant Secretary-General Mueller will brief the Council in detail on the current humanitarian needs and the ongoing United Nations efforts on the ground. As a matter of principle, I want to reiterate that it is essential that the United Nations humanitarian work not be politicized or instrumentalized by any party.

Today's Council meeting is also taking place in the context of a Russian presidential decree of 24 April that reportedly makes it possible for the residents of certain regions of eastern Ukraine to obtain Russian citizenship under a simplified procedure. According to the decree, the decision has been made

“with a view to protecting human and citizens' rights and freedoms, and guided by the universally recognized principles and norms of international law”.

It was welcomed by the entities in control in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine. Reacting to this latest development, the Ukrainian authorities strongly protested the decree as an unprecedented interference by the Russian Federation in the country's internal affairs and a violation of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of Ukraine contrary to the Minsk agreements.

In its resolution 2202 (2015), unanimously adopted on 17 February 2015, the Security Council endorsed the package of measures for the implementation of the Minsk agreements, calling on all parties to fully implement the measures. In its presidential statement of 6 June 2018 (S/PRST/2018/12), the Council again unanimously reaffirmed the centrality of the Minsk

agreements. The United Nations expects that the spirit and the letter of the Minsk agreements will be respected by all concerned. To that end, we urge all the parties to avoid any unilateral steps that may potentially undermine the implementation of the agreements and to address concerns through constructive dialogue in the existing negotiation formats.

Most recently, on 12 February, the Council had a special meeting focusing on the implementation of the Minsk agreements and on the ongoing conflict (see S/PV.8461). As was noted during that meeting, the United Nations continues to fully support the lead efforts of the Normandy Four, the Trilateral Contact Group and the OSCE to reach a peaceful solution to this five-year conflict.

Since their signing, the Normandy Four and participants in the Trilateral Contact Group, as well as the Council, have devoted considerable attention to promoting the need for full implementation of the Minsk agreements. Regrettably, progress has stalled. Following the recent election in Ukraine, those efforts need to continue with greater resolve and urgency. We expect all concerned to act in accordance with the Minsk agreements and once again reiterate the need to revitalize diplomatic efforts. It remains incumbent on all parties to demonstrate the necessary political will and to undertake steps that would decrease the current tensions and allow the resumption of constructive dialogue using existing mechanisms and at all levels.

The United Nations underlines its commitment to the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine, within its internationally recognized borders, in accordance with relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. Against the prevailing dangerous trajectory over the past five years, it is our sincere hope that, at long last, a new positive dynamic can emerge to enable an end to the conflict and prevent it from becoming protracted. That is essential for fostering national cohesion and lasting stability in Ukraine, and critical to the maintenance of peace and security in Europe.

**The President:** I thank Ms. DiCarlo for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Mueller.

**Ms. Mueller:** I thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to brief the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in eastern Ukraine.

Since I briefed the Council two months ago (see S/PV.8461), the conflict in Ukraine has remained an active one. The daily impact on civilians on both sides of the contact line is increasing as coping mechanisms are being stretched to their limits. After five years of conflict, which have seen more than 3,300 civilians killed and up to 9,000 injured, 3.5 million people still need humanitarian assistance and protection. Half a million people, many of whom are elderly, women and children, live within only five kilometres of the contact line, where shelling, gunfire, landmines and unexploded ordnance put them in danger. Many of these people live in settlements that have been isolated by the conflict, making it difficult to access markets, livelihoods, health care and schools.

Shelling damages and disrupts critical civilian infrastructure, even though it serves both sides of the contact line. Since the beginning of 2019, 24 incidents have affected water and sanitation facilities and 12 incidents have affected schools. For instance, the first lift pumping station of the South Donbas waterway, which supplies water to more than 1.1 million people on both sides of the contact line, has already been affected by 16 separate incidents, including shelling, this year. It must be underscored that attacks against civilian infrastructure increase the risks communities face when their access to water, energy and education services is interrupted.

Since I last briefed the Council, civilian workers came under small-arms fire while conducting emergency repairs of impacted power lines in Marinka and water pipelines damaged in the area between Berehove and Olenivka. While no casualties were reported as a result of those incidents, the repair works were suspended and further delayed as the workers were forced to evacuate to safe areas. Parties to the conflict must take all precautions to avoid, and in any event minimize, civilian harm. International humanitarian law must be upheld by all parties to protect civilians and their access to critical services at all times.

In addition, I have previously commended the Government of Ukraine in the Council on the adoption of its national strategy on internally displaced persons (IDPs) — as 1.5 million people are registered as IDPs — and continue to encourage the Government to make sufficient funding available for the implementation of the strategy. The United Nations will continue to support those important efforts for the internally displaced.

I have three messages for the Council's consideration today.

The first is that the freedom of movement of people affected by the crisis must improve. Since April 2014, over 1,000 civilians have been killed or injured by mines and explosive remnants of war. Mine-related incidents were the leading cause of casualties among children last year. That is unacceptable. I implore all parties to immediately cease using landmines and to work with mine-action partners to provide awareness to civilians and plan for demining.

While overall the crossing conditions have improved since last year, essential services at checkpoints need to be further enhanced on both sides of the contact line and delays in crossing must be reduced. Since my most recent briefing to the Council on this subject, 12 civilian deaths were reported at the checkpoints in eastern Ukraine, mainly owing to health issues complicated by delays, bringing the total number to 22 civilian deaths since the beginning of 2019. I must again inform the Council, as I did in February, that there has been no progress on repairing the pedestrian bridge of Stanytsia Luhanska, which civilians — many disabled or elderly with limited mobility — must cross to reach essential services, including health care or access to their pensions, which for many is their only means of support. I regret that I have to encourage again the immediate rebuilding of the bridge and simultaneous improvement of the conditions at the bridge. Speedy passage, in particular for those who are suffering from health issues, must be ensured.

The second message concerns support for humanitarian access in eastern Ukraine, which remains unpredictable, particularly in areas beyond Government control. Humanitarian assistance should not be politicized. The United Nations and its partners provide assistance in accordance with the universally recognized principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. As they seek to reach the most vulnerable civilians, humanitarian organizations require unimpeded and sustained access.

The third message is that every effort must be made to increase humanitarian funding. More resources are urgently required to meet people's needs. Through the 2019 humanitarian response plan, which aims to provide 2.3 million people with protection and assistance to restore their access to livelihoods, essential services and critical infrastructure, the United Nations and

its partners require \$162 million. Humanitarian organizations remain committed to providing relief to the people of Ukraine, but unfortunately, as of today, only 9 per cent of the funding they require has been received. Donors have been generous over the years and the recently established Ukraine Humanitarian Pooled Fund is receiving support from donors, but more is needed. I encourage increased engagement and support for humanitarian action in Ukraine.

The people of Ukraine continue to suffer the effects of this conflict. We must redouble our efforts to provide them with all necessary assistance and protection. I also call on the parties to find solutions to this crisis in order to avoid further suffering. The people of Ukraine deserve nothing less.

**The President:** I thank Ms. Mueller for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Apakan.

**Mr. Apakan:** I thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to brief the Security Council on the security situation in eastern Ukraine. I will provide members with an update on the observations of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), in particular with regard to the implementation of the Minsk agreements and the outcome of the recent discussions in Minsk.

On 24 April, the sides did not reach any agreement in Minsk on a recommitment to the ceasefire on the occasion of the Easter holiday period. Ukraine had announced a unilateral decision to implement a ceasefire as of 18 April. I still believe that a mutual agreement can be reached for that important holiday.

Achieving a sustainable ceasefire is a critical first step to addressing the broader security situation on the ground. Since the last recommitment to the ceasefire on International Women's Day, which was one of the shortest to date, the Mission has recorded more than 50,000 ceasefire violations, including about 15,000 explosions. Ceasefire violations were concentrated in four areas, namely, areas east and north-east of Mariupol, the Popasna-Pervomaisk-Zolote area, the Avdiivka-Yasynuvata-Donetsk airport area and the areas south and south-east of Svitlodarsk. Since 8 March, the SMM has recorded 238 instances of the use of weapons that should have been withdrawn in accordance with the Minsk agreements.

The discussion on the security provisions of the Minsk agreements did not yield substantial progress. Although some commitments to the ceasefire were mutually agreed, they were short-lived, as I mentioned. Additional measures to strengthen the ceasefire are needed. Some concrete steps on humanitarian mine action, in particular around schools and kindergartens, have been taken in recent months. While such steps are encouraging, progress in other areas has remained limited since I last briefed the Council in February (see S/PV. 8461).

No remedial action has been taken to address the worsening security situation in the disengagement areas. Particularly in the disengagement area of Zolote, civilians living in nearby villages have continued to be affected by the gradual re-engagement of forces and hardware. We have reported on casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure there, and I have called on the participants in the Working Group on Security Issues to enable the SMM to have full access to the area. They are encouraging the sides to implement a phased withdrawal of heavy weapons from the populated areas.

On Monday, I returned from a visit to Luhansk, where I joined a commemorative event marking the anniversary of the tragic incident in which our colleague Joseph Stone lost his life. On 23 April 2017, an SMM patrol hit what appeared to be an anti-tank mine on an unpaved road.

Mine-related incidents have continued to claim the lives of civilians. This year alone, the Mission has recorded 15 civilian casualties due to mines, unexploded ordinance and improvised explosive devices, four of whom were killed and 11 injured. As I travelled in the Luhansk region, I saw people preparing for the Easter celebrations and visiting cemeteries. Those sites, located close to the contact line, need to be safe. We are calling on the sides to ensure that, as a matter of urgency, the sites are demined in the coming days.

The SMM remains a comprehensive security instrument. Its presence in the field is reassuring for those caught in the conflict. Through its monitoring, verification and reporting, the Mission contributes to the stabilization of the situation and facilitates the implementation of the Minsk agreements. The protection of civilians continues to be an issue. Much needs to be urgently done to improve the conditions of those living close to the conflict-affected areas. That is especially important with regard to vital civilian infrastructure.

Incidents close to civilian infrastructure sites, including the Donetsk filtration station and the pumping station in Vasylivka, occur with increasing frequency. For six days, beginning on 12 April, tens of thousands of civilians on both sides of the line of contact in the Donetsk region were left with limited access to water due to the damage to the pumping station's water pipelines. As I have mentioned in the past, sustainable solutions to ensure the protection of civilian infrastructure include the full withdrawal of heavy weapons from those areas as well as from populated areas. The SMM-facilitated local ceasefires used for the repair of civilian infrastructure must also be respected.

In the past, I described the hardship faced by civilians. Their situation has unfortunately not improved. The existing entry-exit checkpoints are insufficient to support the large volume of people moving across the contact line on a daily basis.

I have described the struggle of men, women, children and in particular the elderly, having to move across precarious wooden ramps connecting the broken bridge at Stanytsia Luhanska. That remains the only entry-exit checkpoint in the entire Luhansk region. As members may recall, in February, the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Slovak Foreign Minister Lajčák, visited the bridge and the area and highlighted the urgent priority of repairing it. A solution to that pressing issue needs to be found.

The Mission continues to face a challenging security environment. Targeting of SMM unmanned aerial vehicles and signal interference take place with worrying frequency. The situation regarding access and freedom of movement for the SMM has not improved. On the contrary, impediments remain, in particular in areas outside Government control in the southern Donetsk region and in areas close to the border. All those impediments are steadily eroding the Mission's ability to fulfil its mandated tasks. It is the responsibility of the sides to ensure effective monitoring and verification by the OSCE.

I wish to thank the Security Council once again for the opportunity to share the observations of the OSCE SMM. I also wish to express my gratitude for the close cooperation with the United Nations agencies in Ukraine, both in Kyiv and in the field. I am also grateful to Ambassador Sajdik for his support to the SMM. I would like to acknowledge the work of my colleagues,



SMM members and the dedicated men and women with whom I have the honour to work.

Before closing, I would like to underline that civilians deserve the chance to celebrate the current Easter period in peace. Weapons can be silenced if there is the will.

**The President:** I thank Mr. Apakan for his briefing.

As Mr. Apakan will soon complete his term, on behalf of the Security Council, I would like to thank him for all the work he has accomplished. I should also like to ask him to convey to everyone from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine the Council's appreciation for their work.

I now give the floor to Mr. Sajdik.

**Mr. Sajdik:** I am truly honoured to brief the Security Council today once again following my intervention on 12 February (S/PV.8461), in which I spoke about the functions of the Trilateral Contact Group and its working groups, the role of the Normandy Four and its oversight mechanism, enshrined in resolution 2202 (2015) of 17 February 2015.

At the previous meeting on this subject, I spoke one day before our regular negotiating rounds in Minsk. Today, it is one day afterwards. Yesterday in Minsk, I had the opportunity to stress that, according to the international election observation mission led by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the presidential election in Ukraine had been conducted in a way that allowed competition and respected fundamental freedoms. Perhaps, this fact is a bigger victory for the people of Ukraine than for the winner of the electoral race, President-elect Volodymyr Zelensky. In that process, however, the voters, inter alia, clearly signalled their expectation of a lasting peace in the eastern part of the country.

The past years have seen a growing and deepening divide between certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions — that is to say, the territories that are not under the control of the Ukrainian Government — and the rest of Ukraine. It is a divide that has also been fuelled by rhetoric from certain areas in the past months, advocating their further integration with Russia — rhetoric that has been void of any initiative as to how to reintegrate with the Government-controlled part of Ukraine. It is a divide that is symbolized by the use of a different currency in certain areas and

by the fact that there are only five entry and exit points through which a constantly growing number of people — currently some 37,000 — cross the contact line daily, taking often six hours or more to finally get to the other side. This is a real humanitarian issue.

In my 12 February briefing, I urged that the conditions of the existing crossings and opening new entry-exit checkpoints be improved, but nothing has happened so far. As Assistant Secretary-General Ursula Mueller just outlined, the conditions at the crossing point of Stanytsia Luhanska, the only exit point in the Luhansk region, which is a pedestrian bridge, are as bad as ever. The sides have been unable to agree on the technical aspects for erecting an auxiliary bridge to substantially improve the conditions of getting across. The main point of contention is the width of the auxiliary bridge. In their demands, the sides are literally 80 centimetres apart, but neither is willing to make concessions. As a result, elderly people aged 80 years or older who have to travel to the Government-controlled part of the region to collect their small pensions still have to venture down slippery wooden ramps, with injuries being a common feature.

With the sides drifting further and further apart, the efforts of the coordinators of the security, economic and humanitarian working groups — with Ambassador Apakan coordinating the security working group with extraordinary ability and patience — have mostly focused on mitigating the effects of the deepening divide on the populations on both sides of the contact line. By concentrating on the protection of civilians, the number of civilian victims decreased last year by more than half in comparison to 2017, and that is fortunately a continuing trend. The number of casualties from gunfire or shelling has dropped significantly, but mines and unexploded ordnance are ubiquitous dangers near the contact line. More and more mines, particularly anti-tank mines, continue to be laid. The region is now one of the most landmine-contaminated areas in the world. Therefore, demining and an end to remining are essential for the population.

I wish to welcome the decision of the Ukrainian Parliament this morning to amend the financing provisions of the law on demining, which paves the way for active donor engagement in that literally vital activity. Together with Ambassador Apakan, I have many times called on the sides to urgently carry out humanitarian demining around such areas as schools, hospitals and crossing points. Ceasefires brokered

by Ambassador Apakan have tremendously helped to reduce shelling and civilian as well as military casualties. I therefore regret to state that we have not been able to broker a special ceasefire on the occasion of the Easter festivities this year. The sides wanted it but could not agree on a text. It is therefore our hope that the upcoming Orthodox Easter weekend, followed by the May holidays, will still be peaceful.

In the economic sphere, we have managed, for example, to more or less ensure regular water deliveries to the population, especially in certain areas of the Luhansk region, and improved mobile telephone communications across the contact line. But it is not enough to mitigate the effects of the divide; we have to undertake every effort to narrow and even eradicate it. Statements by the future leadership of Ukraine make me optimistic that there is resolve to actively work against that divide.

Yesterday's ukase will most likely not be helpful in that regard. What is really urgently needed is to stop the growing economic disconnectivity across the contact line and reverse the disruptive measures that triggered the brutal interruption of economic links in March 2017. I am referring to the blockade and economic ban on the one side and the so-called external administration, which is nothing other than the expropriation of companies under Ukrainian jurisdiction on the side of certain areas. That should also include the resumption of railway transportation services for passengers. Ways can be found to finally pay the pensions of all those eligible in non-Government controlled areas, starting, for instance, with true hardship cases. Scenarios based on pragmatic solutions also exist thanks to the creative proposals of the International Committee of the Red Cross. Narrowing the divide is also necessary in the political area, especially with regard to the special status of certain areas.

The ultimate goal of our efforts has to be the full implementation of the Minsk agreements, to which, as I stated in my 12 February briefing, there is no alternative. It is in that vein that I welcome the recent remarks of the Secretary General of the OSCE, Ambassador Thomas Greminger, on the idea of a joint United Nations-OSCE mission in eastern Ukraine. I firmly believe that close international cooperation of that kind would be key to the resolution of the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

**The President:** I thank Mr. Sajdik for his briefing. I think that for him the same holds true as for Mr. Apakan.

This might be one his last briefings, if not the his last one, to the Security Council. I also thank him for the work that he has done. I do not know which has been more difficult — heading a committee at the United Nations, as he had previously done, or his present job.

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

**Mr. Delattre (France)** (*spoke in French*): I warmly thank Ms. DiCarlo, Ms. Mueller, Mr. Apakan and Mr. Sajdik for their informative briefings on the tragic situation facing Ukraine. Allow me to express our heartfelt gratitude to Mr. Apakan and Mr. Sajdik for their excellent work.

France condemns in the strongest terms Russia's decision to facilitate the granting of Russian nationality to Ukrainian citizens residing in certain areas of the Ukrainian oblasts of Donetsk and Luhansk. In so doing, Russia is deliberately undermining the spirit of the Minsk agreements.

That provocative decision comes on the heels of the election of a new President in Ukraine, who made the policy of reaching out to the people of eastern Ukraine one of the central aspects of his election campaign. Five years after the beginning of the destabilization of Donbas, Russia, on the other hand, is showing its lack of political will to contribute to the implementation of the Minsk agreements, as well as its disregard for the commitments to which it has subscribed. The decision to facilitate the granting of Russian passports to Ukrainian citizens is a flagrant violation of Ukraine's sovereignty, as was the holding of pseudo-elections in territories under separatist control last 11 November. In that regard, I would like to emphasize three points.

First, the alleged humanitarian grounds presented by the Russian side are baseless. While several million people in Ukraine today are in need of humanitarian assistance, the de facto separatist authorities continue to obstruct humanitarian access to the territories under their control, thereby further aggravating the situation of the most vulnerable people. Concrete actions must now contribute to improving the humanitarian situation. I refer in particular to the renovation of the Stanytsia Luhansk bridge and the opening of new crossing points on both sides of the line of contact to facilitate the movement of hundreds of thousands of people. A new prisoner exchange must also be prioritized, with the last conflict-related prisoner exchange dating back to 2017.

Secondly, it is also urgent to sustainably improve the security situation. The ceasefire is still not being upheld by the parties, nor is the withdrawal of heavy weapons. Mines continue to claim casualties indiscriminately on both sides of the line of contact. Russia has an undeniable responsibility, given its considerable influence over the separatists, which it continues to support financially and militarily.

The Minsk agreements provide for the monitoring of the situation and the implementation of the agreements by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, whose Special Monitoring Mission must enjoy free and unhindered access to the entire conflict zone, as provided for by its mandate. We strongly condemn the impediments to its movement and the attacks on the security of its personnel and equipment that are observed on a daily basis on the ground, particularly in the separatist zone.

Lastly, the solution to the crisis is not to give Russian passports to Ukrainian citizens; it is to respect the commitments undertaken in the Minsk agreements to end the conflict. The latest alarming developments are giving rise to uncertainty, even as the new Ukrainian President-elect Volodymyr Zelensky has shown his determination to relaunch the implementation of the Minsk agreements and engage in closer relations with the populations residing in areas currently outside the control of the Ukrainian Government.

In addition to the Donbas issue, we have not forgotten the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. Five years after the illegal annexation of that Ukrainian peninsula, we are witnessing a steady deterioration in the human rights situation, particularly with regard to the Crimean Tatar community. We are also facing a deteriorated security situation in the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea, following the serious naval incident of November 2018. The 24 Ukrainian sailors detained since 25 November have still not been released, despite our repeated calls for their unconditional release, which I reiterate today.

In conclusion, I reaffirm France's commitment to the territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty of Ukraine, as well as our readiness to pursue our efforts, together with Germany, to resolve the conflict in the context of negotiations in the Normandy format. While the coming months offer us an unprecedented opportunity to relaunch the negotiation process, Russia must now make a gesture of goodwill to honour the

commitments to which it has subscribed, with a view to adopting a positive outlook on settling the conflict.

**Mr. Cohen** (United States of America): The United States, too, condemns Russia's decision to grant expedited Russian citizenship to Ukrainians living in Russia-controlled Donbas. Through that highly provocative action, Russia is clearly intensifying its assault on Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Donbas is in Ukraine and the people there are Ukrainian, regardless of the language they prefer to speak. Conferring citizenship en masse to the citizens of another State undermines and violates the principle of sovereignty. Russia's actions subvert the principles on which the Minsk agreements are based — that Donbas is an integral part of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Government must re-establish its control over that territory.

Russia signed the Minsk agreements in 2014 and 2015, and President Poroshenko and President-elect Zelensky have reaffirmed that those agreements are the best vehicle for ending the conflict in eastern Ukraine. It is unacceptable that Russia would take steps to stymie the peace process just four days after Ukraine's presidential elections. We welcome President-elect Zelensky's expressed commitment to implementing the Minsk agreements and redoubling efforts to support Ukrainian citizens living in territories controlled by Russia.

If Russia were truly interested in the well-being of the Russian-speaking citizens of Ukraine, it would seize this moment to chart a new course in Russian-Ukrainian relations and seek to work with President Poroshenko and his successor to promote peace. Instead, Russia further fuels a conflict that has already claimed over 13,000 lives. Despite that deeply disturbing development, we stand ready to support the efforts of Ukraine to restore Ukrainian Government control over all territory within its internationally recognized borders. United States Special Representative Kurt Volker is prepared to engage intensively with Ukraine, Russia and our partners here at the United Nations to de-escalate the conflict and advance the implementation of the Minsk agreements, including through an international security force that would facilitate their implementation.

Once again, we affirm that our Donbas-related sanctions will remain in place until Russia withdraws its forces from eastern Ukraine and implements the Minsk agreements. Our Crimea-related sanctions will



remain in place until Russia returns control of the peninsula to Ukraine.

**Mr. Trullols Yabra** (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, let me thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this meeting, and we take this opportunity to express our gratitude to all the briefers for the important remarks that they delivered.

The Dominican Republic will always echo the concerns of States when international peace and security are jeopardized. In that regard, we understand that the concerns expressed and the potential impact of the latest developments on the peace process contravene the commitments undertaken by the parties in the Minsk agreements. The Security Council has assumed that the Minsk agreements are the genuine expression of the will of all those involved, including the Council, which endorsed them in resolution 2202 (2015) and strengthened them with presidential statement S/PRST/2018/12, of 6 June 2018.

The parties must reaffirm their commitment to multilateralism and the peaceful settlement of disputes. In that regard, we call on the parties to refrain from any unilateral action that could hinder the process and the efforts being made to achieve peacebuilding in eastern Ukraine. Only in that way will it be possible to restore the conditions that will lay the foundation for ensuring the country's stability and sustainable development.

Just a few days ago, Ukraine concluded its elections, in which the popular vote chose a single winner. In that context, we strongly welcome the timely statements made by the President-elect that he will revive the Minsk agreements and work towards the achievement of the long-awaited peace. In that light, we reiterate our rejection of any hostile act that might undermine the aspirations of the parties to end the conflict. Those are the very wishes of the Ukrainian people and the international community, which vehemently desire a return to normalcy in eastern Ukraine and the region.

The Dominican Republic takes this opportunity to commend the solidarity of and efforts that the United Nations continues to make, together with the international community, to mitigate the difficulties that the civilian population has endured since this situation began. Furthermore, we highlight the high level of commitment of the international community to building a sustainable peace in Ukraine. We call for continued support for all actions that would facilitate a return of peace and restore hope to a nation that,

through free elections, has placed its trust in youth, unity and a more promising future and, as a result, will bring an end to the confrontations that have caused so much harm to the country and its people.

In conclusion, our delegation asks that the dialogue between the parties in the current Normandy format and the Trilateral Contact Group be maintained. At the same time, we express our firm commitment to the defence of the independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine, in absolute adherence to the spirit of the Charter of the United Nations.

**Mrs. Tshabalala** (South Africa): We note that today's discussion is taking place as requested by Ukraine in its letter dated 24 April 2019.

At the outset we wish to thank the briefers for their briefings on the current situation in eastern Ukraine.

It is clear from the briefings and recent developments that there remains an urgent need for the immediate cessation of hostilities in eastern Ukraine. The ongoing tensions and conflict will continue to exacerbate the humanitarian conditions on the ground. In that regard, it is important that the parties ensure that there is an urgent de-escalation of tensions to allow for a situation that is conducive to the alleviation of the humanitarian crisis.

In order to make meaningful progress, it remains necessary that all the parties fully implement all of their respective commitments under the Minsk agreements. At this point, the Minsk agreements, including the package of measures agreed under the Minsk II agreements, provide the most promising road map for the peaceful settlement of the hostilities in eastern Ukraine.

South Africa notes the recent tensions between the parties. It is of critical importance that the parties refrain from actions that could escalate tensions and further destabilize the situation on the ground. Furthermore, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine has played a critical role in the region. It therefore remains important that the Mission continue its work with unhindered access to monitor and verify compliance with the Minsk agreements in line with its mandate. South Africa encourages all the parties to strengthen all diplomatic efforts to produce an inclusive, sustainable and peaceful solution based on cooperation and dialogue.

**Mrs. Van Vlierberge** (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): First of all, allow me to warmly thank the speakers for their informative briefings and to warmly thank Mr. Apakan and Mr. Sajdik for their work of recent years.

On 24 April, the Russian President signed a decree to facilitate the granting of Russian citizenship to residents of certain areas of the Ukrainian oblasts of Luhansk and Donetsk. We condemn that unilateral measure, which not only is contrary to the spirit of the Minsk agreements but may also exacerbate tensions between the parties. We recall Belgium's view that the Minsk agreements remain the only way to reach a lasting political solution to this conflict. Therefore, we expect all parties to refrain from unilateral action, implement the agreements swiftly and fully, and honour their commitments.

Belgium supports the efforts of the Trilateral Contact Group, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Normandy format. We call for the ceasefire to be respected and on Russia to immediately stop fuelling the conflict by providing financial and military support to armed groups and to instead use its influence to encourage these groups to fully comply with their commitments under the Minsk agreements. We strongly encourage the parties to the conflict to respect the mandate of the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine and to allow it safe and unhindered access to all Ukrainian territory, including along the Ukrainian-Russian border and in Crimea.

I reaffirm our unwavering commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. We do not recognize the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia, which we consider to be contrary to international law. We call on the parties to overcome the differences between them and to fully engage in the resumption of the dialogue necessary to achieve a just and lasting peace.

We continue to face many humanitarian challenges. The civilian population on both sides of the line of contact suffers from the presence of heavy weapons and mines, which are contrary to the Minsk agreements. We call for a complete withdrawal of those weapons and the disengagement of troops from designated areas. We urge all parties to allow full access, in accordance with humanitarian principles. We are deeply concerned about the targeting of crucial civilian infrastructure, which is contrary to international humanitarian law. Three and a half million people — as Ms. Mueller

further confirmed — need help and protection due to the widespread presence of mines, increasing psychological trauma and lack of access to basic services.

The human rights situation in eastern Ukraine also continues to attract our attention. In that regard, we support the work of the Human Rights Monitoring Mission of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and call on the parties to allow safe and unhindered access for international observers, in particular the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe.

I should like to conclude by referring to the recent presidential elections held in Ukraine. The elections were a successful test of Ukrainian democracy, five years after the Maidan revolution. The elections, which were well organized and effective, went smoothly and transparently. Fundamental freedoms were widely respected. We congratulate the Ukrainian people on their demonstration of democratic maturity and encourage them to continue the process of reform and the implementation of the European Union Association Agreement.

**Mr. Ndong Mba** (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): First, I want to thank all of today's briefers for elucidating the current situation in Ukraine, especially eastern Ukraine.

The situation in eastern Ukraine remains of great concern to the international community in general and to the Republic of Equatorial Guinea in particular. The parties involved in the conflict have various means at their disposal that could help to facilitate the path towards a peaceful solution to the crisis. Mechanisms such as the Normandy format, the Trilateral Contact Group and the package of measures for the implementation of the Minsk agreements, signed four years ago and endorsed in resolution 2202 (2015), demonstrate the efforts and commitment of the international community to supporting the parties in their search for a sustainable solution to the crisis in eastern Ukraine.

We regretfully note that the process of mediating the crisis in Ukraine is currently stalled. We are therefore of the view that the complete readiness of the parties and their determined political will are the missing components that are key to ending this conflict.

We congratulate Ukraine on the outcome of its recent elections and hope they will help to galvanize the negotiations in a transformational and positive way.

In that regard, we appeal to the parties to show greater political will and to do everything necessary to reduce tensions and achieve a comprehensive and peaceful solution to the crisis.

We continue to witness with deep concern the negative impact that the violence and instability of this protracted conflict continues to have on the population, as well as its detrimental effect on the lives of some 5.2 million people, 3.5 million of whom require urgent humanitarian assistance and protection. Humanitarian conditions on the ground continue to worsen. In 2018, landmines and explosives accounted for more than 40 percent of civilian casualties. In that regard, access for humanitarian personnel to the affected areas is crucial to alleviating people's suffering and improving their living conditions. It is in that context of humanitarian assistance that we should commend the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for the aid it is providing and the humanitarian actors on the ground for their commitment. We urge the parties to ensure the protection and safeguard the security of all those affected by the crisis, with special attention to the most vulnerable, including women, children, the elderly and people with disabilities, and to ensure the protection of infrastructure for the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the delegation of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe for its work on the ground and its efforts to facilitate dialogue and maintain stability in the region. We hope that their efforts, together with the political will of the parties, can help to put an end to this crisis.

In conclusion, we reiterate that the only possible solution to the crisis in the region is a peaceful one achieved through direct, frank and inclusive negotiations, which should focus on reaching a final and just solution that will help strengthen harmonious relations and foster stability in Ukraine and the region.

**Mr. Albanai** (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Ms. Ursula Mueller and Ambassadors Apakan and Sajdik for their valuable briefings on the situation in eastern Ukraine.

We have been following the continued instability in eastern Ukraine, now in its fifth year, with concern. The situation there has had significant humanitarian and economic consequences that affect residents'

daily lives and have damaged its infrastructure. As Ms. Mueller said, more than 3.5 million of 5.2 million people are in need of urgent humanitarian assistance, along with more than 1.5 million who are internally displaced. We therefore urge both parties to refrain from any provocative action that could exacerbate the ongoing conflict or prevent progress being made in implementing the Minsk agreements, which represent the only agreed framework for a regional settlement of the conflict. Demonstrating the necessary political will to recommit fully to the Minsk agreements is still the only way that regional security and stability can be maintained.

We renew our commitment to Ukraine's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, and to non-interference in its internal affairs. We hope that all the relevant parties will fully implement resolution 2202 (2015), the Minsk agreements and presidential statement S/PRST/2018/12, of 6 June 2018. We also hope that they will seek a comprehensive and balanced solution to the issue through dialogue, in line with article 33 of the Charter of the United Nations and in accordance with the Normandy format and the Trilateral Contact Group, with a view to making immediate progress in every area. In that regard, we commend the Special Monitoring Mission of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and its efforts on the ground, especially in facilitating dialogue among all the parties to the conflict.

**Mr. Lewicki** (Poland): At the outset, I would like to thank all the briefers for their valuable contributions to today's discussion. It is very much appreciated, especially given the very short notice for the meeting.

Poland strongly condemns Russia's decision to provide expedited Russian citizenship to the Ukrainian citizens living in Russian-controlled areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine. We should underline that with this step Russia is trying to escalate tensions in Ukraine only days after the presidential elections. In that regard, we welcome the consolidated response from Ukraine's political forces. This is a highly provocative element of the Russian Federation's ongoing aggressive campaign to undermine Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Russia is continuing its policy of flagrant disregard for fundamental principles of international law with respect to Ukraine, including by violating the prohibition on interfering in matters within the domestic jurisdiction of another State.

It should also be emphasized that international law does not permit the widespread naturalization by a State of nationals of another State residing in the latter State's territory. This is a clearly illegal act of coercion against Ukraine and should be viewed as yet another measure designed to escalate the Ukrainian-Russian conflict. Furthermore, as several previous speakers mentioned, it undermines the peace process and in particular the Minsk agreements of 2014 and 2015, which define the modalities for a permanent ceasefire and provide for the reintegration of the temporarily occupied territories back into Ukraine. It follows other hostile steps by Russia towards Ukraine, including illegal elections in non-Government-controlled areas of Ukraine in 2018, an issue that the Security Council met to discuss last year (see S/PV.8386); an attack on Ukrainian ships in the Kerch Strait, as other delegations also mentioned; the introduction of a rouble zone; and the official recognition of documents issued by illegal military bodies in certain parts of Donbas.

We would like to emphasize that it is not the first time Russia has applied such illegal practices to countries in the region. So-called passportization is a well-known component of Russia's strategy of creeping annexation of Georgia's breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Russia's continued fuelling of tensions in Donbas continues to be a direct challenge to international security, with grave implications for the international legal order that protects the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all States, two of the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

In conclusion, the international community should therefore not accept or recognize such a flood of disregard for the fundamental principles of international law and should respond to Russia's unacceptable and illegal behaviour accordingly.

**Mr. Ipo** (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation commends Ms. DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, for her informative briefing on the current situation in eastern Ukraine. We also thank Assistant Secretary-General Mueller and Ambassadors Apakan and Sajdik for their enlightening briefings.

My delegation notes with regret that differences in interpretation are jeopardizing the implementation of the Minsk agreements, in the Normandy format, signed on 12 February 2015. The situation on the

ground remains marked by ongoing violations of the ceasefire and restrictions on the movement of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. In addition, the continuing climate of mistrust between the Ukrainian parties is clearly a major obstacle that could undermine the international community's efforts to restore peace to the Donbas region. Côte d'Ivoire calls on all parties to exercise restraint and urges them to fully implement the Minsk agreements in order to save many human lives and prevent the destruction of civilian infrastructure essential to the provision of basic social services to those in need. In that regard, my country reiterates its support for the efforts of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission and calls on it to fully participate in efforts to restore peace and stability in the region. Côte d'Ivoire reaffirms its support for all actions and efforts to find a negotiated political solution to the crisis in Ukraine. To that end, it urges all stakeholders to strictly respect their commitments in order to maintain the current ceasefire, in accordance with resolution 2202 (2015).

Finally, my delegation welcomes the successful election of His Excellency Mr. Volodymyr Zelensky as President of Ukraine and hopes that it helps to give new momentum to the peace process and to regional cooperation.

**Mr. Ugarelli** (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the convening of this meeting at the request of the delegation of Ukraine and are grateful for the informative briefings, which provide the Council with a complete picture of the current situation in the Ukrainian regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. We also welcome the presence of the Permanent Representative of Ukraine and, through him, congratulate President Volodymyr Zelensky on his recent election.

We express our concern about the recent Russian decree allowing for the expeditious granting of Russian nationality to residents of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, bearing in mind that they are occupied by separatist groups.

Furthermore, we note the recent adoption by the Ukrainian Parliament of a law to strengthen the use of the Ukrainian language, which could affect the rights of linguistic minorities in the country, such as the ones in those regions.



For Peru, the Minsk agreements continue to be the legal basis for reaching a political solution to end the conflict in eastern Ukraine. In that respect, we reiterate our support for the package of measures for their full implementation, which the Council endorsed more than four years ago.

In that regard, we call on all the parties and stakeholders concerned to fully implement the commitments of the agreements, while refraining from measures that impede their implementation, exacerbate tensions and prevent resumption of the necessary dialogue. In that connection, we welcome the continued efforts being made under the Normandy format and the Trilateral Contact Group to facilitate dialogue between the parties in line with the principle of the peaceful settlement of disputes.

Similarly, we acknowledge the role of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission, which between January and March alone reported more than 83,000 ceasefire violations. We reiterate the need for the parties to honour their commitments and comply with that provision, as well as the removal of heavy artillery and mines, which are often in populated areas.

The civilian population, particularly women, children, the elderly and those living on either side of the line of contact, continue to be the main victims of the conflict. In only five years, the conflict has claimed the lives of more than 3,300 civilians and injured more than 9,000 people and has destroyed critical civilian infrastructure.

As noted by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, more than 5.2 million people are affected by the conflict and more than 3.5 million require humanitarian assistance, in addition to more than 1.6 million internally displaced persons.

I conclude by reiterating our commitment to the independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine, including its Government's control of the conflict area, in line with the Charter of the United Nations and the Minsk agreements.

**Mr. Wu Haitao** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China thanks Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo, Assistant Secretary-General Mueller, the Chief Monitor of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, Ambassador Apakan, and the Special Representative

of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine and in the Trilateral Contact Group, Ambassador Sajdik, for their briefings.

China always adopts an objective and impartial position on the issue of Ukraine. We respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries, including Ukraine, and oppose interference in that country's internal affairs by any foreign forces. China is of the view that the signing of the new Minsk agreements and its endorsement by the Security Council in February 2015 have played a crucial role in the political mediation of the Ukrainian crisis. Over the past four years, all parties have held the agreement in high regard. However, regrettably, many provisions of the agreement are yet to be fully and effectively implemented.

The political mediation process of the Ukrainian crisis has stalled. There are still difficulties in effectively ensuring the safety of people's lives and property in the conflict area. We call on the relevant parties to effectively implement the new Minsk agreements, remain committed to a political settlement, overcome the current problems through dialogue and consultation and seek a comprehensive solution to the crisis with a view to achieving peace, stability and development in Ukraine, harmony among its ethnic groups and peaceful coexistence between Ukraine and countries in the region.

**Mr. Syihab** (Indonesia): I wish to thank all of our briefers and welcome my colleague the Permanent Representative of Ukraine. On this occasion, I would like to congratulate the Government and the people of Ukraine on the successful holding of a peaceful and competitive presidential election, which reflects Ukraine's vibrant democracy.

Turning to the topic at hand, Indonesia is worried about the developments in eastern Ukraine. It is very clear from the briefing we have just heard that there is not yet a positive development in eastern Ukraine.

On many occasions Indonesia has stated its principled position on respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. On this occasion I will withhold from repeating it. I would like to highlight three pertinent points.

First, based on the briefings, there remains an urgent need for all parties to refrain from actions that could be perceived as provocative. In the current situation, it

is essential that all the parties concerned exercise the greatest possible restraint in order to prevent it from escalating. We are also against any action that might exacerbate hostilities and cause an already fragile situation on the ground to deteriorate further. For those reasons, Indonesia calls on all the parties to exercise the utmost restraint, manage the crisis responsibly, promote a peaceful settlement and consistently uphold and respect international law.

Secondly, Indonesia has consistently maintained that all the parties concerned must fully implement resolution 2202 (2015). They must cease all hostilities, fully implement the Minsk agreements and stay committed to seeking a comprehensive, lasting solution to the Ukraine issue. We share the view that Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo expressed in her briefing, emphasizing that the Minsk agreements constitute the legal basis for achieving a political solution to end the conflict in the eastern Ukraine pursuant to the relevant Security Council resolutions, as well as presidential statement S/PRST/2018/12. It is always important to reflect and to ask what we can do in order to better implement the agreement in good faith rather than wait for other parties to act.

Thirdly, as we have said many times, any settlement of the crisis in Ukraine must be a political one and should be reached through inclusive and direct dialogue. We also stress the importance of dialogue and diplomacy between the parties concerned so that they can make progress in achieving peace, stability and development in Ukraine. Indonesia believes in the value of dialogue and the importance of settling disputes amicably.

The situation in Ukraine has been on the Council's agenda since February 2014, and progress in the region has unfortunately been limited. While I realize that a bumpy road lies before us, I am still hopeful that the Council will take on its full responsibility for ensuring the maintenance of international peace and security and promoting a dialogue aimed at achieving a universally acceptable solution. Only through genuine dialogue and diplomatic talks among the parties, with the support of the United Nations and the international community, will they be able to reach a sustainable solution to the crisis. For its part, Indonesia will fully support all constructive efforts aimed at resolving the conflict in Ukraine peacefully, in accordance with international law and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

**Mr. Allen (United Kingdom):** It is important that Ukraine is regularly discussed here in the Council. Ms. Mueller told us that the leading cause of death of children in Ukraine is landmines, and that is a grim reminder of the real impact of this ongoing conflict, as also set out by our briefers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Thirteen thousand people have died, 30,000 have been injured and 3.5 million are in need of humanitarian aid in this modern conflict in Europe.

Why are we here? We are here because Russia sent troops to Crimea and later grabbed it after an illegitimate pretence of a referendum, held at the barrel of a Russian gun. Russia's actions were clearly illegal. One hundred Member States voted in favour of General Assembly resolution 68/262 in March 2014, and not one country around this table voted with Russia. Russia sent troops and supported separatists in eastern Ukraine and continues to destabilize those regions, with devastating humanitarian consequences. Last year Russia attacked Ukrainian ships in the Sea of Azov, and it continues to impose daily restrictions on vessels in a blatant attempt to destabilize Ukraine's economy. All those who care about the territorial integrity of Member States and the principle of non-interference should ask Moscow to stop interfering with its neighbour and get off its territory. We therefore condemn President Putin's recent decision on passports, which is further evidence of Russia's aggressive actions aimed at destabilizing Ukraine and undermining its security, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Rather than creating further obstacles to the reintegration of those communities into Ukraine, Russia should focus on implementing the Minsk agreements endorsed by the Council, ending its support for armed separatist formations and ensuring the safe delivery and distribution of humanitarian assistance by international agencies. That is the only way to end the fear and suffering of ordinary people in eastern Ukraine.

Last month was the fifth anniversary of Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea. Apart from their illegal seizure of Ukrainian land, infrastructure and economic assets, the Russian authorities have held illegitimate elections and imposed Russian citizenship, law and military conscription on the population in that part of Ukraine. We have seen an increase in the persecution of ethnic and religious groups such as the Crimean Tatars, including the unlawful detention of 23 Crimeans following recent raids on their homes.

There are continuing reports of arbitrary detentions and arrests, forced disappearances and torture of political opponents and minorities. Seventy-three political prisoners are currently being held in Crimea and Russia. It is unacceptable that the Russian Federation has not cooperated with the General Assembly's calls to allow access for the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

I would like to extend my congratulations to Mr. Volodymyr Zelensky on his success in the presidential election. That peaceful election process is a testament to the development of Ukraine's democracy and an example to some of Ukraine's neighbours. As my Prime Minister has said, we look forward to working with Mr. Zelensky. The Russian Federation had an opportunity to show willingness to work with the new President, reduce tensions, bring calm and work for peace. Sadly, Russia has continued down its aggressive path instead.

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I see that you are turning over your wonderful hourglass once again, Mr. President. I have to tell you that it will not help you turn back time or change the past. Incidentally, I did not see the hourglass at the open debate on sexual violence in conflict (see S/PV.8514). Or is sexual violence in conflict the only subject that can be discussed interminably and with no regard for the clock?

Needless to say, I thank the briefers for their briefings today. Frankly, however, I fail to understand what they have to do with the issue that brings us to the Chamber today at Ukraine's request or what that issue has to do with the Minsk agreements, although in the opinions expressed by Ms. Mueller and Mr. Sajdik, they are apparently related to its discussion because of the dire situation of many Ukrainians and residents of the various areas in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions that Kyiv does not control.

I will not hide the fact that we were surprised by our Ukrainian colleagues' initiative in convening today's meeting, which was immediately supported by the German presidency. After all, it obliges us to talk about some things that are extremely unflattering for Ukraine — actions that have essentially outlawed 4 million of the country's citizens, whose existence has been obstinately ignored by the Western parts of the international community. Of course it would be better for Ukraine to stay modestly quiet about this kind of

thing rather than flaunting it before the whole world, but since it insists, let us talk about it, despite the fact that the issue poses no threat whatever to international peace and security.

To listen to our Western colleagues, one might get the false impression that Russia is forcing the people of Ukraine to change their citizenship, while, of course, and how else could it be, "violating" the Minsk agreements. Let me ask once again: What aspect of the Minsk agreements have we violated? Has anyone here read the Minsk agreements? How many utterly absurd accusations have we not heard today? Let us describe the real version rather than the false, ideologized one that has been put forward. The President of Russia signed a decree under which residents of the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics have the opportunity to obtain Russian citizenship in a simplified procedure. To do that, they are not required — please listen carefully — they are not required to renounce their Ukrainian citizenship. Given that the process of drafting and passing the decree was carried out transparently and began some time ago, there is no reason to claim that the President's decree was timed to coincide with any event or meant to send a message to anyone.

According to data from Russia's Ministry of Internal Affairs, in the period from 1 April 2014 to 2 April 2019, 925,548 citizens from the south-eastern regions of Ukraine entered Russian territory and remained there. Overall, there are 2.3 million Ukrainians in Russia. During the same period, more than 334,000 Ukrainian citizens applied for Russian citizenship, numbers that demonstrate that there is a high demand for Russian citizenship among people from south-eastern Ukraine whose living conditions Kyiv has made intolerable. In other words, Russia's legislative initiative is a response to the aspirations of many thousands of people. It is not we who are forcing them to become Russian citizens but rather they themselves who desire it. We are simply providing them with an opportunity and significantly simplifying the process.

Why was it done? The conflict in Donbas has been going on for five years. For five years, the inhabitants of Donbas have been deprived of the ability to exercise their human rights and freedoms in Ukraine. They were denied the right to vote in the recent presidential elections. Since 2017 the socioeconomic blockade of Donbas, which has de facto existed since 2015, has been toughened and legitimized. For five years, Kyiv's

officialdom has been sabotaging the implementation of the Minsk agreements, subverting, changing and distorting their content. For five years, the Ukrainian authorities have been calling the inhabitants of Donetsk and Luhansk terrorists and separatists. Today's speakers have all referred to the Minsk agreements, which most of them have not read. I will read out two paragraphs from them.

Paragraph seven states that Ukraine must

“[e]nsure safe access, delivery, storage, and distribution of humanitarian assistance to those in need, on the basis of an international mechanism.”

Paragraph eight requires the

“[d]efinition of modalities of full resumption of socioeconomic ties, including social transfers such as pension payments and other payments (incomes and revenues, timely payment of all utility bills, reinstating taxation within the legal framework of Ukraine).

To this end, Ukraine shall reinstate control of the segment of its banking system in the conflict-affected areas and possibly an international mechanism to facilitate such transfers shall be established.”

None of that has happened.

It is obvious to us that most people here have no interest in the people who live in Donbas. It suits them much better to obscure their daily suffering and deprivation behind mythical stories of Russia's imaginary aggression and blame anything and everything on it. They cannot see that the residents of Donetsk and Luhansk have survived all these years in spite of what they have done. They have been deprived of income sources, pensions and benefits that other Ukrainian citizens are entitled to. They would not have survived without Russia, which despite all the West's threats and sanctions refused to abandon a people whom we feel very close to. Yet all this time they kept hoping that the Kyiv authorities would nevertheless fulfil the Minsk agreements and that a long-awaited peace would return to their land.

But in five years nothing has changed, and we can no longer pretend that it has. Five years is quite long enough to define one's view of such a sensitive and important humanitarian issue. The people of Donetsk and Luhansk deserve to have reliable State

care and social protection once again. Like all of us in this Chamber, they hope to see the realization of their legitimate right and those of their children to education, social services, health care and other rights enshrined in the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. They are getting none of that from the Ukrainian Government, and we therefore felt compelled to offer them assistance. And no one is taking anything away from anyone. On the contrary, we are consciously taking on a significant socioeconomic burden. And perhaps now the elderly people whom Mr. Sajdik mentioned will not have to cross the line of contact and risk their lives to collect their miserable pensions on territory controlled by the official authorities. And yet instead of commending us all we have heard from our Western colleagues today are hypocritical, clichéd accusations of Russia's acts of aggression and insidious plans against Ukraine.

The decree under discussion today was signed on the basis of article 14 of Russia's federal citizenship law, which provides for the possibility of granting Russian citizenship through a simplified process. It in no way contradicts Russian legislation. According to part one of article 29 of the federal law, for humanitarian purposes the President of the Russian Federation may determine categories of foreign citizens and stateless persons having the right to apply for Russian citizenship through a simplified process. Besides, our actions are part of a more general trend aimed at simplifying migration procedures and the rules granting residency and citizenship. In 2018, for example, according to Eurostat, States in the European Union provided protection to more than 300,000 people requesting asylum. I would like to point out that granting citizenship is a sovereign right of every State. In accordance with the European Convention on Nationality of 1997, each State has the right to determine in its own legislation who its nationals are. The preamble to that international treaty establishes that in matters concerning nationality, account should be taken of the legitimate interests of both States and individuals. Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares that no one can be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality or the right to change his nationality.

We know what Mr. Yelchenko will say in his statement. He will say that this is interference in Ukraine's internal affairs, a flagrant violation of international law and the Russian Constitution, the creeping annexation of the territory of Donbas and the



creation of an opportunity to challenge its affiliation. I want to answer him now. None of that has anything to do with reality. We are not interfering in the internal affairs of Ukraine or engaged in a creeping annexation. We are simply giving people the opportunity to finally solve issues of vital importance to them, because the Kyiv authorities have refused to, in violation of the Minsk agreements. The people will decide for themselves whether to exercise that right or not. In the final analysis, even before the decree was issued hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians had applied for Russian citizenship. We have never refused them and now we have just simplified the process for the most vulnerable of them. Of course, for Kyiv, the number of applications for Russian citizenship will become a litmus test and a referendum on the attitude to it of the residents of Donbas, and apparently that is precisely what the current Kyiv Government fears. I want to underscore once again that Russia is not imposing citizenship on the inhabitants of Donbas but rather giving them an opportunity to apply for it voluntarily and independently under the established procedure to the competent Russian authorities while preserving their Ukrainian citizenship.

We seriously and sincerely hope that the new Ukrainian authorities will not only change the previous Government's rhetoric regarding Donbas and its inhabitants, a good illustration of which is the hackneyed clichés of today's statement by the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry, but will also take real steps to implement the Minsk agreements and take into account the interests of its citizens in south-eastern Ukraine. If that happens, we will be only too glad.

**The President:** I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Germany.

I would first like to align myself with the statement made by my French colleague in the Normandy format. We have worked very closely together and I subscribe to everything he said.

I just listened to Mr. Nebenzia's statement and I must admit that I have always been fascinated by Russian diplomacy. I believe the Russian State Institute of International Relations has textbooks that prescribe the patterns of behaviour to be followed in Russian foreign policy. Mr. Lewicki, the representative of Poland, mentioned earlier that there are other examples of the passport policy that are applied on a regular basis.

The German Foreign Service teaches us how to deal with a country with which we have strained relations or a President with whom we may not be on the best of terms. If there is a new, inexperienced President, we would perhaps send that President rhetorical flowers and write a congratulatory letter before inviting him or her to visit us.

In Russia, one could do the same thing. There is a new President. Perhaps it was not possible to work with the old one, but now a new one has been elected. Rhetorical flowers could be sent — paragraph 1 of the Minsk agreements and a full ceasefire could be implemented, or Russia could liberate the 24 marines that are in prison or, with respect to the bridge of Stanytsia Luhanska, the Ukrainians could be granted the 80 centimetres and finally people can cross the bridge.

However, that is not in the textbooks of the Russian State Institute of International Relations. Rather, its textbooks teach that if there is a new, inexperienced leader, efforts should be made to intimidate him on the first day following his election in order to provoke him and try to catch him off guard. That is what Russia has been doing. That is textbook diplomacy and those of us old enough to remember will recall how when John F. Kennedy became President, Khrushchev provoked him.

Another lesson in Russian textbooks is that one should not miss an opportunity for cynicism. Accordingly, President Putin signed the decree on passports yesterday, on 24 April, the International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace, the day on which at the General Assembly we all spoke about multilateralism and the need to adhere to an international rules-based order. By its actions, Russia demonstrated its disdain for the international rules-based order.

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

I give the floor to the representative of Ukraine.

**Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine):** Mr. President, we appreciate your swift reaction and that of your team and the convening of this briefing at such short notice, at the request of our delegation.

I thank the members of the Security Council who condemned the illegitimate decree of the Russian President. I could wish the briefers had focused more on that specific issue, which is the main purpose of today's meeting, but I will try to fill that gap. I ask the

indulgence of the Council because I will probably take a little more time than the sand in the hourglass permits.

The Council has already heard the Russian attempt to sell the decree to the wider United Nations membership. As you have already mentioned, Mr. President, it is the usual Russian-style subversive diplomacy that the Council is accustomed to by now — cynical misinterpretation, manipulation, lies and disinformation. I am once again fascinated by the talented foresight of Mr. Nebenzia, who knows in advance what I am going to say. Just consider this. Only yesterday, when Putin was signing the decree, his Minister for Foreign Affairs was delivering a statement at — just imagine — the Moscow Conference on International Security. That is such a nice title. He said:

“We hope the new Ukrainian leadership will realize its responsibility and will contribute to the settlement of the crisis by fully implementing the Minsk package of measures within the Trilateral Contact Group and the Normandy format, in full accordance with Security Council resolution 2202 (2015). Germany and France will have to play an important role not to allow any attempts to review the Minsk agreements.”

Shall we take it that the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing? I doubt it. That is the usual behaviour of Russia — double-speak and putting the blame on others.

On 26 November 2018, when speaking before the Council (see S/PV.8410), I compared the Russian aggression in Ukraine to the Soviet dirty war against its neighbour in 1939. Unfortunately, history seems to be repeating itself. The Russian Federation is steadily embarking on the same road that led to the expulsion of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics from the League of Nations. Like the Russian representative today, the Soviet diplomats at the time would stop at nothing to offer excuses for Moscow's flagrant violation of international law. For example, when Soviet planes were bombing a neighbouring country, then Minister for Foreign Affairs Molotov insisted that the bombers were not dropping bombs but rather food for the starving.

It looks like our Russian colleagues are making their arguments with exactly the same logic. In the distorted reality of hybrid war, the Kremlin seems to be bringing to life George Orwell's satire, in which war is peace, freedom is slavery and ignorance is strength. It is impossible to explain otherwise how a transparent

and cynical passport gambit could be made to look like a humanitarian act.

Yesterday's decree is yet another appalling episode in a chain of events designed to grab the Russian-occupied territories from Ukraine. The fake elections in 2014 and 2018, organized by the Kremlin in breach of its obligations under the Minsk agreements, the introduction of the ruble zone, the expropriation of Ukrainian enterprises, the official recognition of documents issued by illegal bodies, the incidents of piracy, the capture of Ukrainian sailors in Ukrainian territorial waters and now the decree are all different pieces of one puzzle — Russia's creeping occupation of Ukraine.

As stressed by the President of Ukraine, the signing of the decree is yet another example of interference by the Russian Federation in the internal affairs of an independent State. It is a brutal violation of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of Ukraine. It is also a wholesale dismissal by Russia of its obligations in the framework of the Minsk agreements. The agreements clearly state Russia's commitments — stop the shelling, withdraw Russian troops and armaments, free Ukrainian hostages and return the control of the State border to Ukraine. In that regard, Russia's categorical refusal to support the initiative of Ukraine and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to launch an Easter armistice starting on 26 April is not accidental.

In addition, the Kremlin has deliberately and cynically violated international humanitarian law, which prohibits the occupation's authorities from changing the citizenship of the inhabitants of the occupied territories. Why? Because the Russian Federation cannot hide any more the presence of its regular military and mercenaries in Donbas or conceal its lead role in the armed conflict there. That is why it decided to switch from the five-year-old mantra “they are not there” to the revanchist slogan “our citizens are there”. We heard that before the Second World War, we heard that in Georgia and we all know where that slogan leads.

The provocative and destabilizing nature of the decision of the Russian side becomes obvious after even a cursory glance at the Russian-Georgian conflict in South Ossetia. Here are some facts. In 2006, more than 90 per cent of the residents of the Georgian region of South Ossetia held Russian citizenship. On 8 August

2008, with the beginning of hostilities in South Ossetia, the Russian President made the following statement at the meeting of the country's Security Council. It is worth recalling:

“Now in South Ossetia, peaceful people—women, children, elderly — are dying. Most of them are citizens of the Russian Federation. In accordance with the Constitution and federal laws [of Russia], as the President of the Russian Federation, I have to defend the lives and dignity of Russian citizens, no matter where they are. The logic of our actions now is defined by these circumstances. We will not allow the death of our compatriots to go unpunished. Those responsible will be brought to account.”

Council members know the rest. More than 10 years after the conflict, Georgia's territorial integrity has yet to be restored and the Geneva International Discussions, launched in 2008 with participation of the United Nations, the OSCE and the European Union, have yet to bear fruit.

Now let us return to the situation in the Ukrainian Donbas. Distributing Russian passports en masse in that region can easily be used by the Kremlin to legitimize its military presence in Ukrainian territory in the name of protecting would-be Russian citizens. The Kremlin's decision is clear proof that Moscow is choosing that scenario.

It is nothing but a thinly veiled attempt to justify the ongoing occupation of those territories, to wrest them from Ukraine and dismember my country. It is nothing but an artificial pretext to continue sending Russian troops to Ukraine and sustain the undisguised military aggression against my country. It is nothing but a premeditated and concerted effort to undercut prospects for a peace settlement on the basis of the full and proper implementation of the Minsk agreements. Indeed, the illegitimate decree of the Russian President completely undermines the logic of the Minsk agreements and, in fact, makes their implementation practically impossible.

Council members must judge for themselves. The purpose of the Minsk agreements is the reintegration of the temporarily occupied areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions into the legal, political and economic space of Ukraine. In contrast, the logic of the Russian President's decree is disintegration and consolidation of total Russian control over the occupied territories. Are those not clear signs of a creeping annexation?

Importantly, distributing Russian passports in the occupied territories will make it practically impossible to conduct legitimate local elections there in accordance with the Ukrainian legislation and relevant OSCE standards under the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights monitoring, as envisaged by the Minsk agreements.

I also have a specific question for Ambassador Nebenzia.

*(spoke in Russian)*

Would he also find nothing unusual about a situation in which the citizens of border areas in Russia were systematically given passports en masse by other States?

This is, instead, a story about how difficult life has become for people in Donbas.

*(spoke in English)*

Does the Russian leadership not realize that its actions totally disrupt the Minsk agreements? Does Russia not realize what kind of ticking time bomb it is planting? Does Russia not realize that it is responsible for undermining the peaceful settlement process in the eastern part of Ukrainian Donbas?

I think the Kremlin realizes all of that very well but is doing it on purpose. Implementation of the Minsk agreements was never the intention of the Russian side. Destabilization and fragmentation of Ukraine has been the crystal-clear intent behind its every move during the last five years. But Russia will bear responsibility for its actions. That is why reinforcing international pressure on the Kremlin, including new targeted sanctions against the aggressor State, should be our shared endeavour. That is the way to bring Russia back onto the path of implementation of its obligations under the Minsk agreements. That is the way to peaceful settlement in eastern Donbas.

Council members will recall the meeting less than three months ago, on 12 February (see S/PV.8461), when the Russian representative was going out of his way to convince everybody that the Ukrainian side was sabotaging the implementation of the agreements. We were accused of — and I quote the Russian representative — “venturing new provocations that threaten only to worsen the situation and ruin the peace process” (*ibid.*, p. 10).

It is indeed true that actions speak louder than words. Are there any doubts in anyone's mind as to who is responsible for stalling the implementation of the Minsk agreements? The answer should be obvious. Russia's purpose is clear — to destabilize Ukraine, even more so in this post-electoral period, and ruin the Minsk agreements, all of which is in direct defiance of the consistent calls by the international community demanding that the parties refrain from taking any unilateral steps that might undermine the Minsk process.

The illegal issuance of passports to Ukrainian citizens also means that the Kremlin recognizes its occupation of Ukrainian territories in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions and is in fact making another step towards the annexation of that occupied territory. By its decision, Russia once again debunks the narrative of its own propaganda that this is a so-called internal conflict in Ukraine.

Russia's neighbours know all too well how skilfully the country is using a humanitarian pretext to interfere in internal affairs and to invade. We learned this not from the Finns, the Poles or the Georgians but from our own experience. While we were under Soviet domination, Moscow applied forced Russification and moved Russian settlers to non-Russian areas. Now, under the pretext of protecting ethnic Russians and all Russian-speakers, Moscow is trying to restore its domination by meddling in the internal affairs of other countries and annexing territories.

We know all too well in Donbas and in South Ossetia and Abkhazia that Russian tanks and rocket launchers are Moscow's favourite tools for protecting Russian-speakers. We also know that the purely humanitarian action of passport distribution is usually a prelude to further aggression and annexation, as was stressed in the appeal to the United Nations and other international organizations adopted yesterday by the Parliament of my country.

Ukraine will do everything possible to protect, provide adequate assistance to, and ensure respect for, the rights of its citizens residing in the temporarily occupied territories, including those who may be forced by the Russian occupation authorities into acquiring Russian citizenship. Yesterday's decree by the Russian President is simply illegal. It is a blatant breach of Russia's obligations and commitments under bilateral and multilateral agreements and documents.

Ukraine does not recognize any consequences of that act. The Security Council should consider it null and void. Ukraine urges Russia to immediately cancel that presidential decree as well as decree No. 74, of 18 February 2017, relating to the recognition of documents and license plates issued in the occupied part of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

I call on the Security Council to prevent the worst-case scenario and resolutely condemn the destructive and illegal actions of the Russian authorities and to restore respect for the Charter of the United Nations. The members of the Security Council sitting around this table have a single choice to make — to wrap up this meeting without taking a decision or turn once again to expressing serious concerns and calling on both sides to respect the Minsk agreements. But let us be honest — unless the majority of this Council is ready to come up with real action, even if it is to be challenged by Russia, the aggressive behaviour of our neighbour will never be stopped. History knows that appeasement of aggressors never stops them.

Finally, since we have representatives of the OSCE and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs here with us, I would like to ask them some questions. I would like to ask Ambassadors Apakan and Sajdik whether, in their assessment, the Russian decision on citizenship contributes to implementation of the Minsk agreements or complicates it.

I would like to ask Assistant Secretary-General Mueller, from whom we heard about the difficult humanitarian situation in the occupied territories of the Donbas — and her report is accurate — whether, in her assessment, the Russian President's decree is a warranted and justified response to the difficult humanitarian situation, and in what ways the Russian side can truly contribute to alleviating the humanitarian crisis that it itself has created.

**The President:** The representative of the Russian Federation has asked to make a further statement.

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would first like to ask you how you managed to get hold of our secret diplomatic textbook. You could almost have been reading it aloud. I recognized it from my time at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations. That was exactly what it was like. Some other time I will tell you about what else you can find there.



I would like to share the feelings I was left with after the statements by our Western colleagues and Mr. Yelchenko, particularly since he asked me a direct question that I want to answer. In general, we heard nothing new today, just the same tired, unfounded accusations and even openly distorted facts. I was especially amused to hear that Russia apparently blocked the Easter truce in Donbas. Mr. Sajdik, who participated in the meeting of the Trilateral Contract Group, knows more about that. I will not ask him today how many Russian troops he has seen in Donbas since the last time we met with him. That question I will not ask. But what I would like to ask him is why the Easter truce between the parties did not happen.

Based on today's discussion, any observer could be left with the impression that nothing has changed. However, I would like to point out that in the past month a great deal has changed. The Ukrainian people categorically and resoundingly rejected everything that President Poroshenko has done in the past five years, both in Ukraine and in relation to Russia. And no attempts to use Poroshenko's usual lying anti-Russian rhetoric can change that situation, which testifies to the fact that the Ukrainian people have spoken very clearly. They want real change, normal relations with Russia, a dignified life and a peaceful future for their children. They are tired of the attempts to blame Russia for all Ukraine's troubles, which is frankly what President Poroshenko has done during all his years in power. The people of Ukraine need real action and steps towards peace, which means having a real dialogue with the people of Donetsk and Luhansk. That is the basis for settling any conflict — a direct dialogue between the conflicting parties, which the Ukrainian side has consistently refused to do this entire time. The keys to resolving the Ukrainian issue are in Kyiv, not Moscow, and in the Western capitals that have enabled Kyiv to sabotage the Minsk agreements.

As regards the rhetorical flowers that you suggested sending to President-elect Zelensky, Mr. President, it is still too early for flowers. So far he has been sending mixed signals. We are genuinely interested in seeing him take real steps to deal with the situation, but we will learn his intentions from his actions, and not before. We will therefore wait to see how he realizes his declared intention of changing the situation in Donbas. We will see if he complies with the Minsk agreements or comes up with new formats for how to do it. Time will tell.

As for Mr. Yelchenko's question, he undoubtedly knows that hundreds of thousands of people in Russia have dual citizenship. And incidentally, he knows very well that some of Ukraine's neighbours issue their countries' passports to Ukrainian citizens of non-Ukrainian extraction, and there are hundreds of thousands of them. And there are hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of citizens in Russia who have dual citizenship. That is well known both in our country and in the rest of the world, and we are not going to deprive them of their right to accept if someone offers them citizenship of another country, whether it borders us or not. I want to emphasize once again that unlike what Mr. Yelchenko said, no one is going to make these people take a Russian passport. It is their choice of their own free will. No one is going to drag them into a Russian internal affairs office and force them to accept a passport.

I will say it again. They have the right to keep their Ukrainian citizenship. This is a humanitarian measure. Please try to understand that. Russia truly wants peace, and seeing our brother country of Ukraine stable and flourishing is in our interests. That is essentially the purpose of the President's decree, which is aimed at ensuring that citizens who have ended up in terrible, wretched living conditions have an opportunity for social protection and development, and for an education for themselves and their children in Russian schools alongside Russian citizens. It has nothing to do with the Minsk agreements and is no way prevents Ukraine, Donetsk and Luhansk from implementing them. That can be done if the political will for it is there.

**The President:** In addition to the questions asked of the briefers, in my national capacity I would like to add one further question for Mr. Apakan with regard to his work and that of the monitors of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Can he tell from the statistics where access for the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine is most impeded? Is it more in the Ukrainian Government-controlled area or in the area that is not controlled by the Government?

I now give the floor to Assistant Secretary-General Mueller to respond to comments and questions raised.

**Ms. Mueller:** I would like to respond to the question posed by the Ambassador of Ukraine, which was about how all the parties can contribute to alleviating human suffering. I first want to implore all the parties to immediately cease using landmines and work with

Mine Action Service partners to provide awareness to civilians and plans for demining.

Secondly, I would like to call on the parties to the conflict to take every possible precaution to prevent or at least minimize civilian harm. International law must be upheld by all the parties so as to protect civilians and their access to critical services at all times. Very concretely, I urge that the pedestrian bridge at Stanytsia Luhanska be rebuilt and also that the conditions at the bridge be improved to enable speedy passage across it, in particular for the elderly, who desperately need access to their pensions and to health services.

Finally, humanitarian assistance should not be politicized. Humanitarian assistance is provided based on the universally recognized principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence.

**The President:** I thank Ms. Mueller for the clarifications she has provided.

I now give the floor to Mr. Sajdik to respond to the comments and questions raised.

**Mr. Sajdik:** In the past nearly four years Ambassador Apakan and I have been able to divide our work quite well. I will therefore refer to the statement by the chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) that was issued today.

I do not think that I need to quote it word by word but I will say that the Slovak chairmanship believes that Russia's unilateral measure

“could undermine the efforts for a peaceful resolution of the crisis in and around Ukraine, and calls for adherence to the OSCE principles and commitments by all its participating States. The chairmanship invites all sides to refrain from unilateral steps and to jointly continue searching for ways to fully implement the Minsk agreements.”

That is just one part of today's statement.

I should like to add the answer I provided to a journalist, who I believe was from TASS, at my press briefing in Minsk concerning my assessment. I said the following to him in Russian:

*(spoke in Russian)*

“As you know, I have always been committed to following the letter and the spirit of the Minsk agreements, based on the principles of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine”.

*(spoke in English)*

With regard to the question asked by the representative of Russia as to why no agreement was reached yesterday on the Easter truce, I believe that I addressed that in my briefing. I can only repeat what I said, which is that, unfortunately, the sides could not agree on the text of the statement. We proposed two texts, both of which had previously been adopted on the occasion of earlier ceasefires. In this specific case, sadly, neither text was found acceptable. One text was unacceptable for the Ukrainian side, while the other was unacceptable for the Russian representatives and the representatives of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Despite all the efforts of Ambassador Apakan, we were unable to reach an agreed text.

**The President:** I now give the floor to Mr. Apakan.

**Mr. Apakan:** Actually, I have nothing to add to Ambassador Sajdik's explanations. In Minsk, our expectation yesterday was to reach a recommitment to the Easter ceasefire. To that end, there was an agreement on the date and timing of such a ceasefire. I am referring to the discussions of the working group on security. However, each side took a different approach to the text of the statement. I believe that they missed an opportunity yesterday.

In response to the question by the Permanent Representative of Germany, I have to say that, with regard to access to southern areas of Donetsk, the non-Government side is a real issue for us. Our access and observation capacity is limited. I must add that there is also some limited access to southern border regions. We have been going to border regions through Izvaryne more frequently than in past years. However, there are still some issues, which limits our ability to observe all of Donbas, particularly the non-Government side. I do not want to go through specific location names and details, but that is what we have experienced. In my briefing today, as well as in Minsk and at the Permanent Council of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), I emphasized those points.

Lastly, Ambassador Sajdik referred to the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office statement on unilateral measures. I must say that I share Mr. Sajdik's views and the Chairperson-in-Office on that point.

*The meeting rose at 5.15 p.m.*