**Speech by Ambassador Ertugrul Apakan, Chief Monitor of the OSCE, Head of the Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine at the III. Istanbul Conference on Mediation**

**27 June 2014, Istanbul**

Madam Chair,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to speak to you today. I came from Kyiv, where I am currently located. As you know, since mid-April, I am heading the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine and act as Chief Monitor.

As a regional arrangement under Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations, the OSCE acts as an instrument for early warning, conflict prevention and resolution, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation. The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, basing itself upon OSCE principles and commitments, is also engaged across the different phases of the conflict cycle and is trying to reduce tensions and fostering peace, stability and security.

Our mission has a specific mandate that was given to us by the 57 participating States of the OSCE. I can summarize the first pillar of our mission as monitoring and reporting.

The second pillar of our mandate is to facilitate dialogue on the ground in order to reduce tensions and promote normalization of the situation in the country.

Working under the principles of impartiality and transparency, we have at an initial stage deployed 100 monitors to these 10 locations and have gradually increased this number. At present we have a total of 234 monitoring officers. Forty two of the 57 participating States are represented in the SMM. Monitors are civilians and come from different backgrounds, all with high calibre and varied relevant experience.

The first build up phase allowed us to make ourselves known to the people and to the different stakeholders.

The SMM has witnessed a significant deterioration in security in east Ukraine over the reporting period, especially in Luhansk and Donetsk regions. The rapid deterioration of the security situation has directly hit SMM as currently, we have a total of eight international, civilian monitors missing – four from Donetsk-based team and four from Luhansk-based team. They have been abducted at sudden illegal road blocks in Luhansk region while carrying out regular patrolling.

We are directing our efforts through different channels to get access and establish contact with those holding our colleagues and to our colleagues themselves.

Let me use this platform to call for the immediate and unconditional release of our monitors.

We have adapted our posture following the new security situation in order to continue performing our tasks. We have somewhat downsized our teams in Donetsk and Luhansk regions by regrouping our monitors. This is a temporary measure and with our downsized but still effective teams, we are monitoring and reporting about developments in those regions and continuing our dialogue and facilitation work on a daily basis.

In many regions of Ukraine, we have come across new situations in areas that we were monitoring since March. The events in Crimea and growing violence in the east have led to displacement. The United Nations is aware of 34.336 internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Crimea and Donbas. However, the actual number of people who have fled the violence and fighting in the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk is believed to be higher and increasing daily.

We have also embarked on the mission of assisting dialogue throughout the country at both national, regional or local levels.

We genuinely believe in the value of a Ukrainian-led and Ukrainian-owned dialogue within the Ukrainian society in order to build a new foundation and resolve outstanding grievances.

Through its impartial and objective stance, the SMM has rapidly established itself as an actor in Ukraine and as a result, I have engaged in Kiev on a daily basis with national and international interlocutors- both Governmental and non-Governmental. I have had several meetings with high ranking visitors to Kyiv in which they have expressed their support and asked our impressions resulting from our monitoring. At the same time, the SMM is more and more involved in the efforts of the international community related to deescalating the situation in the country.

The Geneva Statement on Ukraine was issued on 17 April 2014 by representatives of the European Union, United States, Ukraine and the Russian Federation. It sets out the agreed initial concrete steps to de-escalate tensions and restore security for all. In the Statement that was adopted, the OSCE SMM in Ukraine was explicitely mentioned and even given the task to “*play a leading role in assisting Ukrainian authorities and local communities in the implementation of the different measures*” agreed by Parties.

SMM took up activities immediately after the release of the Geneva statement and made necessary contacts on the ground to inform all relevant stakeholders about its content. Unfortunately while action was taken along the provisions of the Statement, many of the steps that were foreseen in the Statement did not materialize.

We positively assess recent efforts to implement steps that were agreed in Geneva.

On 7 June, the newly elected President Poroshenko announced during his inauguration speech main pillars of a peace plan and called upon all those who illegally took weapons to disarm. In this regard, he mentioned the following measures that could be realized:

* amnesty for those who laid down weapons and did not commit serious crime
* establishment of a controlled corridor for retreat of foreign fighters
* launch of inclusive dialogue

One day later, 8 June, he chaired the first meeting of a Tripartite Contact Group with Russia and the OSCE in order to work on the modalities of a Peace Plan.

On 20 June, President Poroshenko announced a ceasefire and a 15-point plan for the peaceful settlement of the crisis in Eastern Ukraine.

According to the agreed common vision, the Plan will go through several consecutive stages of implementation. Cessation of hostilities/ceasefire; humanitarian relief and related international support to it; and, an all-inclusive political process within the parameters of the decentralization understood broadly.

On 23 June, the Trilateral Contact Group met in Donetsk representatives from both Donetsk and Luhansk. On 25 June, President Poroshenko welcomed the consultations on his peace plan held within the Trilateral Contact Group in Donetsk and said they constituted a “first step towards peaceful dialogue on the settlement of the situation in the East of Ukraine”.

Upon the request of the Ukrainian Authorities, SMM started making preparations in order to contribute to the implementation of the Peace Plan.

As a way to create confidence, SMM teams in Donetsk region are attempting to facilitate the implementation of local projects such as repair of crucial infrastructure for the electricity and water supply of cities, which both were damaged during recent fighting.

As the current ceasefire is until today (Friday 27 June) 22.00 hours local time, we see merit in prolonging this period in order to give a chance for building confidence between sides and enable the political process and the implementation of other parts of the Presidential peace plan. Despite many incidents have taken place since it was declared, we remain convinced that sustainable cease fire is of utmost importance to allow de-escalation.

Let me try to draw some conclusions from the first stage of our missions:

Our mission, made of civilian monitors is an innovative instrument of conflict prevention, of de-escalation and of stabilization. Indeed it is through our day to day close contacts with the ground and working in close cooperation with the Ukrainian authorities that we try to have an impact and foster stability and normalization. Our tools are OSCE’s concept of comprehensive security and OSCE values.

There are of course limits of what a civilian mission like the SMM can achieve. It is clear that we can only fulfill soft security measures and where security guarantees exist. But there are also advantages of what a mission such as the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, acting as an impartial and transparent manner, can achieve. In this regard, there is clearly capacity to act by using the confidence and sympathy it has acquired through its contacts, its impartial monitoring and reporting and its gradually increasing role as a reliable actor on the ground.

Our joint efforts of reducing tensions and fostering peace, stability and security in Ukraine will continue. The days and weeks ahead are vital ones for the people of Ukraine. The Presidential election on 25 May, the launching of a new process based on the Presidential Peace Plan, a sustained cease fire and dialogue are now important pillars of the newly emerging agenda.

The stability of Ukraine is in all our interests. Many stakeholders are now working with the support of the international community to stabilize the country. The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission will do all it can to facilitate and support these efforts.

A final word on our cooperation with the United Nations. During my previous tenure as Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations, I was among the initiators of the Group of Friends of Mediation in the UN, which had the purpose of promoting the use of mediation in conflict prevention and resolution. At the present time, I am engaged in a mission whose assets are based on the use of mediation and other soft security means in order to diffuse tensions.

We appreciate the interest shown by the United Nations to the efforts to deescalate the situation in Ukraine. The United Nations has worked alongside the OSCE, the EU and other partners to support moves to find a political solution, monitor human rights and improve humanitarian preparedness.

The crisis in Ukraine has both internal and external dynamics.

Our monitors interact on a daily basis with various people on the ground. Beyond the armed militants they also hear the silent majority of the country and the messages we hear are towards more democracy, stronger institutions and dialogue.

After the Presidential elections, which received praise from ODIHR’s election observation mission, parliamentary and local elections will also be instrumental for the future of the country. There is also demand for bridging the communication gap between Kiev and the regions, empowerment of civil society, solidifying institutional legitimacy and creating a unifying agenda for the country. All these measures are seen as necessary in order to increase the cohesion of the Ukrainian society.

There is a need to empower new entry points, new interlocutors in the political debate. There is a growing middle class, a vibrant civil society with dynamic components such as women organisations and others ready to be connected to the political debate and ready to shape the political agenda. Locally elected actors can play an important role. There has to be all inclusive approach, a political agenda that is unifying the different layers of the society. In parallel, we see a need for institutions to be strengthened.

Ending corruption at all levels and the preeminence of the rule of law are also common grievances that are reported to our monitors. We can hear a clear demand of the civil society to increase its role in the political consultations and decision making processes.

The problems facing Ukraine are an European issue and can be resolved through European solutions. This means increasing effective participation, institutional legitimacy and pluralism.

There is a clear demand for the rule of law as it represents the main pillar of social co-habitation.

There is a demand for normalisation, for stability and for a more democratic, tolerant society. The presence of OSCE monitors, their interaction with people is a stabilizing factor in itself. It gives confidence to the democratic forces in the country. We can contribute through our presence to the normalisation. We will continue to assist Ukrainian authorities in their endevours.

These are my candid observations combining my longer United Nations but shorter OSCE experience.

Thank you.