

*Comment by the Russian Mission to the OSCE:*

The following comment is made in order to let the distinguished readers know first hand the Russian position on the matter.

We will leave aside the formulations used by the author of the article to describe Russia's actions, since they do not reflect the realities on the ground, but may be part of the author's personal attitude or the edition's policies with regard to narratives on Ukraine.

In 2022, the closure of the two OSCE field operations in Ukraine, namely the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission and the Office of the OSCE Project Co-ordinator, appeared to be a natural outcome of their failure to fully implement their mandates.

For SMM, its leadership openly preconditioned the fulfillment of its critical tasks – establishing contacts with the local authorities and communities, as well as facilitating dialogue on the ground in order to reduce tensions and promote normalization of the situation – by political considerations, which contradicted the mandate of this “flagship operation”. Frankly speaking, the Mission openly demanded that the authorities in Donetsk and Lugansk should declare their political loyalty to the Kiev regime – something that was written nowhere: neither in the Minsk agreements, nor in the SMM mandate. As a result, the security situation throughout Ukraine deteriorated dramatically by January-February 2022, causing serious military escalation.

The activities of the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine (PCU) were based on a number of projects, which should have been improving the situation in Ukraine with human rights, rule of law etc. Those were developed by the PCU office in close cooperation with the authorities in Kiev. However, in parallel to triumphant reports on progress and successes, which Amb.H.Villadsen presented in the OSCE Permanent Council, various independent international organizations, as well as the UN specialized structures, reported on significant deterioration of human rights situation in Ukraine. Discriminatory practices introduced by the Ukrainian authorities against Russian-speaking population and representatives of national minorities became wide-spread and common practice and were enshrined in Ukraine's legislation. The raise of aggressive nationalism and neo-Nazism, which became a hallmark of modern-day Ukraine, was hard to ignore. Despite this, the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine refused to admit these problems and act in order to improve the dire situation. In fact, he failed in delivering on his utmost and primary task – promoting OSCE principles and commitments in Ukraine.

It is noteworthy, that Amb.H.Villadsen devoted much attention to developing extrabudgetary projects, co-financed by a certain group of participating States (almost all of them – NATO members), and even reported in 2019 that he had co-ordinated his activities with the EU and NATO offices in Ukraine. This financing was ten times higher than amounts, that the PCU office received from the OSCE Unified budget. No surprise, whose interests were at the first place for the PCU at that time.

Launching the so-called “Support Programme for Ukraine” is a purely voluntaristic move by the Polish OSCE Chairmanship and the OSCE Secretariat, based on demand of the same certain group of OSCE participating States. The idea was not discussed among all participating States, it did not receive any approval from the OSCE Permanent Council either. The structure and contents of the new “Programme” are intended to replicate those of the former Office of the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine. Even the above-mentioned Amb.H.Villadsen was nominated by the Polish OSCE Chairmanship on

31 October to manage the activities of the “Programme”, in circumvention of the existing rules and procedures.

As we understand it, the aim of such actions is in fact to continue building “Potyomkin villages” with regards to Ukraine by replicating the unsuccessful PCU extrabudgetary activities, namely by launching projects with nice labels but with no practical outcome in improving the overall situation in Ukraine. Just to create a smokescreen of a “democratic Ukraine” under the rule of the western-sponsored Kiev regime. We are aware of the portfolio of the so-called “Programme”, which consists for the time-being of over 20 projects, which are going to be presented in the Secretariat on 3 November. With a bit more emphasis on environmental aspects, it is a kind of “copy-paste” of all former ExB projects of the PCU.

The current “Programme” is initiated and co-financed by only a dozen of OSCE participating States, not by the OSCE as an Organization. No wonder: from the very beginning, it will be perceived as nothing but politically motivated performance in supporting the Kiev regime in Ukraine, but not as a tool of utilizing the OSCE capacities to promote our commonly agreed principles and commitments.