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POLICY, AT THE OSCE CONFERENCE ON RACISM,
XENOPHOBIA AND DISCRIMINATION**

Vienna, 4-5 September 2003

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Conference Participants,

We believe that this Conference is an extremely important event, and we are grateful for the opportunity to share experience and information on problems and to devise a strategy and specific recommendations with a view to meeting more fully our obligations in the new historical circumstances. For our country, the OSCE commitments in the area of combating discrimination and xenophobia, and also the recommendations drawn up under the auspices of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (the Lund, Hague and Oslo Recommendations), provided guidance for the drafting of new federal laws ensuring the rights and freedoms of Russia's citizens and laws ensuring the legal basis for the practice and development of the languages, education, culture and art of the peoples of the Russian Federation and for the national public associations, including national and cultural autonomous bodies for ethnic minorities.

The Conceptual Framework for a State nationalities policy was adopted by presidential decree. Its basic principles are the equality of human and citizens' rights and freedoms without distinction as to race, language or religion and the prohibition of activities intended to stir up social, racial, inter-ethnic or religious discord. The Russian Government and leadership along with the regional authorities regard the Framework as a unique charter and its implementation as one of the strategic actions for building a harmonious integrated society.

Let me cite just one example. Only 10 years ago, around 40 languages of the peoples of Russia were studied in Russian schools. Now more than 80 languages are studied in the State education system, and there are around 9,000 schools for ethnic minorities. (In Moscow alone, around 60 schools have been established with an ethno-cultural component of various ethnic minorities. In the Republic of Bashkortostan, for example, arrangements have been made in schools for the study of 15 ethnic minority languages. In one village where there is a Latvian population of around 300, final-year students had their mother tongue Latvian as a subject for their school leaving exam.)

Russia is not only a multi-ethnic State but also a multi-denominational one, where several world religions are represented. As at 1 January 2003, there were 21,500 registered religious organizations representing more than 60 denominations. After the Russian Orthodox Church, Muslim organizations occupied second place as regards the number of religious associations. Of the latter, there are almost 3,000 in Russia. During the 1990s, thousands of new mosques were built in all areas with a large Muslim population (some 18 million persons in total). In recent years, the number of Protestant, Catholic and other religious associations has increased noticeably.

The Russian Federation is one of the few countries in the world in which the Constitution provides for a form of ethno-territorial autonomy for native non-Russian peoples with the most important attributes of statehood and a high level of self-government and federal representation. Out of the 89 constituent entities of the Russian Federation enjoying equal rights, 32 are virtually nation States of some kind enjoying complete political and administrative autonomy. There are around 2,000 ethnic public organizations, more than 300 national and cultural autonomous bodies at a regional and local level and 14 at the federal level which are active in Russia and which in their overwhelming majority interact with State authorities at all levels and local self-government authorities. Our delegation includes three representatives (heads) of non-governmental organizations.

In terms of its scale, this is a unique experience for the European area of implementing a policy aimed at achieving coexistence with equal rights of representatives of different nationalities, races, ethnic cultures and religions.

Despite the conflict unleashed by international terrorists in the Chechen Republic and attempts thereby to provoke wide-scale inter-ethnic confrontation, we are continuing constructive efforts to strengthen the unity of Russia's peoples.

However, the terrorist acts committed in Moscow and other cities have nevertheless provided grounds for an extremist attitude in the search for the "guilty" on the basis of ethnic and racial characteristics. The huge migration flow (6 million) was a specific factor that complicated matters.

Given these circumstances, the State is taking decisive measures to combat and prevent extremism. The "Law on Combating Extremist Activities" has entered into force and provides for greater accountability, including criminal accountability, for the establishment of groups promoting social, racial and religious intolerance. The activities of the National Great Power Party of Russia (NDPR) and the association "Russian National Unity" have been banned. Following a court decision a further 15 organizations have been declared as extremist and have been banned. The office of the public prosecutor is investigating around 30 criminal cases filed on account of unlawful actions against representatives of various ethnic groups.

The office of the public prosecutor in the Rostov region has warned a number of leaders of Cossack organizations whose statements stirred up inter-ethnic discord.

Only this year, the Ministry for Press, Television and Radio Broadcasting issued warnings to 42 publications for articles which were likely to foment inter-ethnic enmity.

We are concerned about numerous cases of xenophobia on a daily basis, particularly among young people. With a view to preventing extremist manifestations on the part of

informal youth groups, the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs has conducted a number of preventive operations and averted more than 70 acts.

The law-enforcement agencies are moving over from repressive to broader educational measures. A special federal programme entitled "Promotion of Tolerant Attitudes and Prevention of Extremism in Russian Society" is being implemented and provides for a system of measures in educational institutions to increase the social role of the family, public organizations, the media and the State. Special topics on human rights and the history, culture, customs and traditions of the peoples of Russia have been introduced into the curriculum of training institutions of the Russian Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Internal Affairs with a view to educating the students in the culture of the inter-ethnic dealings.

The position of the Russian authorities with regard to discriminatory manifestation in public life may be described in the words of President Vladimir Putin: "All peoples must feel as comfortable in Russia as they do in their own home". Russia will build this kind of home for all its citizens, striving to meet the ideals and principles of our Organization - the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

Thank you for your attention.