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AT THE 1337th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

30 September 2021

**On the rise of neo-Nazism in the OSCE area as a consequence of the
“Munich betrayal” of 1938**

Madam Chairperson,

Exactly 83 years ago, on the night of 29 to 30 September 1938, German Chancellor Adolf Hitler, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, French Prime Minister Édouard Daladier and Italian Prime Minister Benito Mussolini signed the so-called “Munich Agreement”. Historians refer to it more accurately as the “Munich betrayal”. Under the agreement, Czechoslovakia was to cede Sudetenland to Germany within ten days. However, Czechoslovak representatives were not even invited to discuss the terms of the document, and only signed the final version.

It is well known that the attempt to placate the aggressor failed. This so-called “appeasement policy” resulted in years of bloody war, tens of millions of dead, injured and missing, the Holocaust, Nazi concentration camps, hunger, devastation and other human suffering for millions of people.

In his article “75th Anniversary of the Great Victory: Shared Responsibility to History and our Future”, President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation noted in particular: “The partition of Czechoslovakia was brutal and cynical. Munich destroyed even the formal, fragile guarantees that remained on the continent. It showed that mutual agreements were worthless. It was the Munich Betrayal that served as the ‘trigger’ and made the great war in Europe inevitable. Today, European politicians, and Polish leaders in particular, wish to sweep the Munich Betrayal under the carpet. Why? The fact that their countries once broke their commitments and supported the Munich Betrayal, with some of them even participating in divvying up the take, is not the only reason. Another is that it is kind of embarrassing to recall that during those dramatic days of 1938, the Soviet Union was the only one to stand up for Czechoslovakia.”

Cynical attempts have been made in some countries to redefine the causes and outcome of the Second World War. Historical facts are blatantly distorted for the sake of self-seeking interests, the Red Army’s decisive role in the victory over Nazism is disputed and the liberators are put on the same level as the executioners. Persistent efforts are being made to elevate those who fought against the countries of the anti-Hitler coalition or who collaborated with the Nazis to the status of national heroes and figureheads of national liberation movements. Positions are deliberately switched to obscure the heinous crimes of the Nazis and their henchmen. The fictions about Nazi Germany and the USSR allegedly being equally

responsible for starting the war – as if the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact had “untied the hands” of the Third Reich – are in a similar vein.

Despite the legal mechanisms that have been established, Nazi ideology is on the rise again today in a number of OSCE participating States. The idea of racial supremacy is openly propagandized, radical nationalists are rearing their heads, and there are increasing attempts to divide society along ethnic, linguistic and religious lines.

In Ukraine, neo-Nazism is in full bloom. Far-right radicals, who espouse ideas of Ukrainian exceptionalism and use Nazi-style symbols, have long been part of Ukraine’s everyday political landscape. Their associations regularly draw attention to themselves for their intolerance and violence, as the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission’s observations also attest. Neo-Nazi paramilitary organizations feel quite comfortable, having been allowed by the authorities to take up arms and go to Donbas to kill their compatriots. Many were incorporated into Ukraine’s law enforcement and security agencies in 2016, enabling them to officially influence decisions there.

The Ukrainian authorities have elevated the glorification of Hitler’s Ukrainian nationalist collaborators to the level of State policy, naming streets and social facilities after them. Such an honour, for example, was bestowed on the Nazi henchman Stepan Bandera, who, on 30 June 1941 from a balcony in Lviv, proclaimed his intention “to collaborate closely with National Socialist Germany, which, under the leadership of its leader Adolf Hitler, is creating a new order in Europe”. This is an extract from the Act of Proclamation of the Ukrainian State, which was published in the newspapers of the time and is readily available. On the same day, a three-day pogrom against the Jews broke out in the city, claiming thousands of civilian lives. Every year neo-Nazi marches are held in honour of Bandera, with the assistance of the authorities, and the “hero” himself is vaunted by the authorities as a fighter for the Ukrainian idea. Many streets and even the city stadium in Ternopil are named after another Nazi collaborator, Roman Shukhevych, a member of the Nazi occupying forces who became infamous for his active involvement in the extermination of Poles, Jews, Ukrainians, Russians and Belarusians. To this day, many people shudder at the mention of the Volhynia massacre.

We might also recall the march under police escort and guard in Kyiv on 28 April this year in honour of the 14th Ukrainian Grenadier Division of the SS (1st Galician). Or the ceremony on 13 June in Kyiv to mark the death of the divisional commander Orest Vaskul, which was attended by the presidential regiment. These are just a few of the many examples.

Against this background, in violation of international legal obligations, a campaign has been launched in the country to destroy any symbols commemorating the victory over Nazism, including monuments to the liberating soldiers.

These are the realities of today’s Ukraine, a country whose authorities have not learned the lessons from the terrible pages of the past. Incidentally, today is not just the anniversary of the “Munich betrayal”. The mass shooting of Jews at Babi Yar also began 80 years ago. To this day it has not been possible to calculate the exact number of people killed. Historians have estimated the number to be as high as 150,000. This evil was perpetrated with the active participation of members of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists.

The situation in the Baltic States is extremely alarming. Processions by members and supporters of the Latvian Legion of the SS are held every year in Latvia. This year, in view of the coronavirus pandemic, the procession had to be cancelled, but admirers of the SS still held a memorial ceremony at the Freedom Monument in Riga, where officials were also spotted. In Lithuania, the Forest Brothers are glorified at the

State level. I would remind you that the backbone of this movement were former servicemen who had been listed as members of the SS territorial battalions. They were also joined by local nationalists, who, after the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the Baltics in 1941, organized pogroms against the Jews there, the cruelty of which often surpassed even the atrocities committed by the Nazis. In Estonia, monuments to SS members are erected, and annual gatherings of former SS members and their accomplices are organized with official approval. The annual gathering of Nazi supporters at the monument located at the summit of Sinimäe is widely publicized. Not only are the authorities failing to prevent this ceremony from happening, but the Estonian military and members of the Estonian Parliament periodically participate in it.

The United States of America has a high rate of racially and ethnically motivated crimes, facilitated by the abundance of extremist and neo-Nazi groups in the country. For example, the Southern Poverty Law Center, an influential US non-governmental organization, indicated that there are around 940 extremist groups operating in the United States (figures for 2019).

Recently, human rights activists have noted the dissemination of racist and neo-Nazi ideology among US military personnel, and reports of high-profile crimes committed by US soldiers who are followers of racist ideologies and members of radical groups have been repeatedly published in the media. The problem is compounded by the fact that military personnel are not prohibited from joining nationalist and racist organizations. US military officials acknowledged at a congressional hearing in February 2020 that membership of a nationalist group is “not prohibited” but that “active participation” in the group could lead to administrative sanctions. They also admitted that they did not have exact figures on the number of US military personnel held administratively liable for supporting racist ideas.

There are too many incidents of this nature. You can read more in the report by the Russian Foreign Ministry’s Commissioner for Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law.

In the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Sweden and a number of other countries, former Nazis have not been openly glorified, but rather sheltered and actively exploited. Hundreds of criminals have found a warm welcome there, and even work in government positions.

There is a need to join forces to combat the shameful phenomenon of neo-Nazism. That is why the Russian Federation, with a wide range of co-sponsors, submits an annual resolution to the United Nations General Assembly on combating the glorification of Nazism, which is supported by an absolute majority of the United Nations Member States. Only two States – the United States of America and Ukraine – consistently vote against it.

The picture is similar here at the OSCE. Just a few participating States stubbornly persist in refusing to discuss neo-Nazism, which is a highly uncomfortable topic for them. Apparently, they believe that if a problem is “silenced”, this will imply that it is “non-existent”. We are forced to disappoint them: the neo-Nazi threat is only getting worse. And if you don’t want to think about yourself today, think about your children tomorrow. We recall that the OSCE has clear commitments on neo-Nazism, and a number of joint statements by participating States have been made, not least at the ministerial level. Stubborn attempts to prevent the OSCE from discussing such a pressing issue are very dangerous. This approach is contrary to the Charter of the United Nations and the Helsinki Final Act, not to mention the verdicts of the Nuremberg Tribunal.

This year, Russia again attempted to raise this issue in the OSCE and to put it on the agenda of the annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. Several delegations were strongly opposed to it. Their arguments do not stand up to criticism. We therefore reiterate that the responsibility for not holding the event lies solely with those States that try to cover up neo-Nazism. We are about to hear some of them now.

To conclude, the “Munich betrayal” and the Nazi crimes must not be allowed to be forgotten. The lessons of history must remain in our collective memory, and especially in the memory of the younger generation.

Thank you for your attention.