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Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1229th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

23 May 2019

**In response to the report by the
OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Mr. Lamberto Zannier**

Mr. Chairperson,
Distinguished High Commissioner,

We are pleased to welcome you to the Permanent Council and thank you for the detailed account of your multifaceted activities. We look forward to your upcoming visit to Russia and are counting on fruitful discussion on ways of building inter-ethnic harmony in the OSCE area.

A quarter of a century after the creation of the institution of the High Commissioner, its work has become even more in demand. According to the Ljubljana Guidelines, “States should not define themselves in exclusivist and (mono)-ethnic terms as the ‘property’ of one or several specific ethnicities.”

However, the situation in the OSCE area is shaping up differently. Nationalistic and chauvinistic tendencies are frequently accompanied by discrimination against the “non-titular” population, which is seen as a threat to the national security of States.

The crisis in Ukraine is a cause of growing concern. You say that you “support efforts to promote the knowledge of the State language as a key tool to facilitate integration and social cohesion”. However, the adoption by the Ukrainian Government of the scandalous laws on the State language and on education, resulting in coercive and total Ukrainization, leads not to cohesiveness but to disunity. The actions of the Ukrainian authorities contravene the country’s international commitments and its own legislation. They are at odds with the Minsk Package of Measures, which enshrined the right of Ukrainian citizens living in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions to “linguistic self-determination”. As a result, the Russian-speaking population is deprived of their fundamental rights and possibilities for participating in the life of the State effectively and on an equal basis.

You made reference in your statement to the Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations on National Minorities in Inter-State Relations (which were not adopted by consensus), paragraph 5 of which clearly mentions that “States should guarantee the right of everyone, including persons belonging to national minorities, to equality before the law and to equal protection under the law. In this respect, discrimination based on belonging to a national minority or related grounds is prohibited. Achieving substantive equality

may require special measures and such measures should not be regarded as being discriminatory.” Paragraph 6 goes on to say “States should respect and promote the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, including the right freely to express, preserve and develop their cultural, linguistic or religious identity free from any attempts at assimilation against their will.” We expect this to be taken into account in your work.

In Ukraine, representatives of the Russian community are subject to repression. Among them are Sergey Provatorov, co-ordinator of the All-Ukrainian Council of Russian Compatriots, Viktor Shestakov, chairman of the Russian community of the Poltava region, and Oleg Slepynin, head of the non-governmental organization Pushkin’s Ring. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church is also subject to persecution. We count on your objective assessment of these discriminatory measures. We urge support for the new Ukrainian administration in normalizing the situation. We shall speak in more detail about the Law on the State Language under the Current Issues agenda item.

The excesses in Ukraine are to a certain extent a consequence of the indulgence of similar violations in the Baltic countries, whose national minority policies have become “contagious”.

You rightly emphasize that “integrated and multilingual education is a fundamental recipe for building inclusive societies that are resilient to crisis and conflict”. In that regard, we are surprised at your complacent assessment of the situation in Estonia, where education in Russian is being systematically curtailed throughout the country. Under the pretext of “consolidation” of educational institutions, schools are being merged and switched to teaching exclusively in the Estonian language. In this way, the Russian education system, which has a 300-year history, is being eliminated. Recent comments by the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights also bear witness to the serious situation in Estonia. It expresses concern at the “punitive approach” to enforcing the Language Act and the “systematic discrimination” of parts of the population, particularly non-citizens, “due to a lack of proficiency in the Estonian language”.

We have repeatedly drawn attention to the situation in Latvia, where, under the pretext of “integration” and “strengthening the position of the State language”, the rights and interests of over a third of the population are being trampled upon. The phenomenon of mass statelessness persists, and a discriminatory education policy is being pursued. The aim of all these new laws is to stamp out the Russian language in public life, bureaucratic procedures, schools and higher education. By way of comparison, Swedish is the second State language in Finland, although this minority accounts for less than 10 per cent of the population, while 38 per cent of the inhabitants of Latvia are Russian speakers.

The Advisory Committee of the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities called on the Lithuanian authorities to “ensure that education reform does not result in discrimination against students from minority language schools”. The experts are seriously concerned that Lithuania could adopt the misguided practice of its neighbours in this regard.

Unfortunately, these problems are by no means always given due reflection in the work of the relevant OSCE structures. You have considerable resources and the necessary funds within your mandate. We urge you to continue to respond to such challenges and threats in a timely manner.

It is a characteristic of all these States, incidentally, that they tend to glorify Nazism. The direct connection with the repression of national minorities is evident. We recommend that you and the participating States study this phenomenon more attentively. The recently published report by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia on neo-Nazism and xenophobia might be of assistance in this regard:

(www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/humanitarian_cooperation/asset_publisher/bB3NYd16mBFC/content/id/3193903).

We emphasize the need for the High Commissioner to pay constant attention to the situation of the Serbian population of Kosovo and Metohija. There is a need for the reliable guarantee of their rights and the creation in the territory of an atmosphere of genuine inter-ethnic harmony. Without this, the long-standing international efforts to settle the Kosovo conflict are doomed to failure.

In conclusion, we wish you, esteemed High Commissioner, and your team every success in your work.

Thank you for your attention.