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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1276th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

23 July 2020

In response to the address by the Chair of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, Alternate Minister for Foreign Affairs of Greece, Mr. Miltiadis Varvitsiotis

Mr. Chairperson,

We are pleased to welcome the distinguished Mr. Miltiadis Varvitsiotis to this Permanent Council meeting, albeit virtually. We congratulate Greece on its Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

The coronavirus pandemic has dealt a significant blow to the OSCE area of responsibility, the profound implications of which remain to be understood. The crisis should have demonstrated that the principles of honest, mutually beneficial co-operation and collaboration have primacy over immediate opportunistic interests. Unfortunately, there is nothing much to brag about. We should be putting aside differences and uniting in the face of common threats, but burdensome contradictions and political ambitions are still dragging us down.

In the current difficult context, the OSCE's interaction with the Council of Europe, as an authoritative regional organization that acts as a unifying force within our continent's humanitarian and legal space, is of particular importance. The priorities of the Greek Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers offer further opportunities for this. We welcome the decision of the Greek Government to focus its six-month watch on the protection of human life and public health in the context of the pandemic. It is important to pool our efforts to solve the problems that really concern most Europeans and to pay due attention to the protection of social rights of citizens.

The activities of the two pan-European structures, the OSCE and the Council of Europe, should be closely co-ordinated to avoid duplication and dissipation of resources. Co-operation between them should be transparent and collegial. Non-consensus methodology, unilateral approaches and confrontational language are unacceptable.

We need to further develop co-operation in four well-known priority areas, namely fighting terrorism, combating trafficking in human beings, protecting the rights of national minorities, and promoting tolerance and non-discrimination. We consider the theme of artificial intelligence to be a promising area for joint work.

The situation remains of particular concern in Ukraine, where human rights abuses and harassment of the Russian and Russian-speaking populations and national minorities have become systematic. The Ukrainian Government is demonstrably violating international obligations, the standards of the Council of Europe and even the provisions of its own Constitution. Discriminatory legislation has been adopted and is being implemented that has narrowed the linguistic, educational and religious rights of millions of citizens. Domestic legislation is tailored to suit the political situation, and the recommendations of international institutions are ignored altogether. We are talking, first and foremost, about the laws on supporting the functioning of the Ukrainian language as the State language, on education and on full general secondary education.

Thus, starting from 1 September of this year, all schools teaching in Russian and other languages that are not languages of the European Union or of indigenous peoples must switch to Ukrainian. From 2023, mother-tongue instruction in State secondary schools will also not be available to other national minorities. Apparently, the language of instruction rather than quality is the defining criterion in the provision of State education. The Ukrainian Government is consciously pursuing a policy of supplanting everything Russian, and of forced Ukrainization and assimilation of the non-Ukrainian-speaking population.

Typically, representatives of large minority communities living in the country already prefer to apply to the authorities of their “mother” countries for protection of their national and cultural rights rather than to the authorities of Ukraine itself. This was the case, for example, with the Hungarian, Bulgarian and Romanian communities. All this only shows that Ukrainian citizens of different nationalities have almost completely lost confidence in the ability of the Ukrainian Government to guarantee the protection of their rights. Does it benefit the unity of Ukraine? The answer to the question whether the discriminatory practices of the Ukrainian authorities are compatible with the task of creating a common European space is also clear.

We are forced once again to draw attention to the crackdown on the rights of the Russian-speaking population and national minorities and the persecution of the Russian language in the Baltic States. This, as well as the persistence of the shameful phenomenon of “non-citizens” in Latvia and Estonia, requires a clear and decisive response from the Council of Europe.

We should like to remind the Ukrainian Government, which is so eager to join the European Union, as well as the authorities in Latvia and Estonia, that the documents of the European Union, whose work is based on the principles of linguistic diversity, do not provide for a selective approach to the languages of national minorities – not to mention the relevant international agreements within the Council of Europe.

With the upsurge in racism, chauvinism and other forms of discrimination and intolerance affecting States from North America to Europe, joint international efforts to combat these anti-human phenomena are of particular relevance. It is impossible to ignore the growth of aggressive nationalism and neo-Nazism in a number of countries. Co-operation and dialogue between our two organizations in these areas should be strengthened and developed.

We expect that in the year of the 75th anniversary of the victory over Nazism, the Council of Europe and the Greek Government will react appropriately to attempts to glorify Nazi collaborators and to desecrate monuments to liberator soldiers.

We are convinced, Mr. Varvitsiotis, that the joint efforts by the OSCE and the Council of Europe can make a significant contribution to the solution of the acute humanitarian problems of our continent. The Russian Federation is prepared to participate fully in this process.

Thank you for your attention.