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**STATEMENT BY MR. DMITRY BALAKIN,
DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1128th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

19 January 2017

**Regarding the observance of the language rights of the
Russian-speaking population of Lithuania**

Mr. Chairperson,

We are forced to draw the attention of the Permanent Council to the situation of the Russian-speaking population of Lithuania and the safeguarding of their language rights.

On 11 January this year, the Vilnius Municipal Council passed a decision to close the Senamiestis Russian-language school and to merge it with the joint Russian-Polish Liepkalnis school. Pupils will now be obliged to travel to another part of the city far from where they live. This decision is the latest measure by the municipal authorities to implement the plan on school reform in the Lithuanian capital adopted in 2015. We recall that the Tsentro Russian-language school in Vilnius was closed in the same way last year.

At the present time there are only 31 educational establishments in the whole of Lithuania with teaching in Russian. Attempts by the Lithuanian authorities to explain the closure of these schools because of the significant decrease in the number of pupils do not stand up to criticism. Tsentro had more than 100 pupils and Senamiestis around 200. The situation is aggravated by the fact that Senamiestis was the only Russian school in the district. Moreover, experience of bilingual education under one roof has shown that the quality of education also suffers.

The plans to close the school naturally gave rise to negative reactions from the teaching staff, pupils, parents and the Russian community in the Lithuanian capital. On the day the decision was adopted, a protest meeting was held at the town hall demanding that the school remain open. The protestors stated that the municipal authorities did not wish to participate in constructive dialogue on the problems of school reform and claimed that Senamiestis was an evidently political decision.

The actions of the authorities in Vilnius penalize children from national minorities and deprive them of the prospect of unrestricted education in their native language, a right set forth not only in the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania but also in corresponding

international instruments, notably the specific sections of CSCE/OSCE documents and decisions adopted in Vienna in 1989, Copenhagen and Paris in 1990, Helsinki in 1992, Istanbul in 1999 and elsewhere.

In that connection, we appeal to the leaders of Lithuania to safeguard the rights of national and linguistic minorities in full measure. We trust that the Austrian Chairmanship and also the Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities will pay close attention to this matter.

Thank you for your attention.