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**STATEMENT BY MR. ANDREY KELIN,  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,  
AT THE MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

1 March 2012

**Regarding the referendum in Latvia on the status of the Russian language**

Mr. Chairperson,

The referendum held in Latvia on 18 February on the status of the Russian language once again revealed how critical the ethnic problems are in this country. The active participation of Russian native speakers in the referendum testifies to their disagreement with the evolution towards a mono-ethnic society.

One of the significant results of the referendum was the convincing victory of supporters of amendments to the Constitution of Latvia in places with a high proportion of non-titular inhabitants. In Latgale, for example, more than 60 per cent voted for making Russian a second official language. In this regard, it should be pointed out that 319,000 so-called non-citizens were denied the right to express their opinion despite the fact that the subject of the referendum had a direct bearing on their interests and despite the fact that they make up one sixth of the country's population.

In the opinion of independent observers, the Latvian authorities used administrative resources in preparing for the referendum. There was a vigorous ideological campaign to discredit both the initiators and the very idea of holding a referendum. Thus, all State channels refused even on a commercial basis to broadcast video clips by the association "Native Language" with information about the holding of the referendum. At the same time video clips were made at the State's expense encouraging people to vote against amendments to the Constitution.

We are also seriously concerned by the limitations placed on participation by international observers. This casts a shadow on the conformity of the referendum with basic democratic standards. The delegation of the Civic Chamber of Russia was not granted observer status for the referendum in spite of the fact that the request was submitted in good time and in compliance with the provisions of the law of Latvia.

In general, the referendum in Latvia showed only the tip of the iceberg. Over the last 20 years the problems associated with ensuring the rights of national minorities in a wide variety of fields have merely got worse and become chronic. The continued trend towards

systematic discrimination of a significant part of the population of the country runs counter to the recommendations of relevant international organizations and exacerbates inter-ethnic friction.

The reaction to the referendum by leading figures in the country also gives rise to concern. Instead of using it as a starting point for inter-community dialogue among equals, the government of the country, it would appear, is deliberately using the results of the referendum to make its present language policy even tougher.

All of these tendencies call for greater attention by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and also the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. Unfortunately, these OSCE institutions, which are responsible for observing human rights, failed to take part in the monitoring of the referendum and to all practical purposes completely ignored it.

We once again urge the Latvian authorities to remove their reservations concerning the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and to begin, finally, to comply with the recommendations of authoritative international bodies: the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities. We would expect the European Union not to remain neutral and to take decisive measures to rectify the situation in Latvia.

Thank you for your attention.