

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
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AT THE 1100th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

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**On the violation of the rights of migrant children
in countries of the European Union**

Mr. Chairperson,

We are forced once again to draw attention to the mass disappearance of migrant children in the European Union (EU) and the violation of their rights.

We already raised this problem in February of this year. We were prompted to do so on that occasion by information from the European Police Office (Europol) that Member States of the EU do not have information available on the 10,000 unaccompanied children who have entered the territory and registered as asylum seekers. Hearings were recently held on this topic in the European Parliament Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs attended by representatives of Europol, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) and the non-governmental organization Missing Children Europe. The discussion showed that the situation has not improved in the past few months.

The assessments heard regarding the overall number of homeless and unaccompanied children in EU States became even more alarming, since many EU countries are only beginning to discover that migrant children are “missing”. At the same time, the trend of a growing proportion of children among the migrants who have arrived in the EU continues – there was a 35 per cent increase during the first three months of 2016 compared to the same period last year.

It is not without reason that Europol and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees continue to fear that some of the children who have gone missing ended up in the clutches of criminal groups and are being used for the purposes of sexual and labour exploitation, begging, drug smuggling and the illegal removal of human organs. Nor is their recruitment to criminal groups and terrorist cells ruled out.

Europol believes that the roots of the problem should be sought in the shortcomings of the registration procedures for migrants in the EU and the exchange of information between States on missing children. Representatives of the FRA have also recognized the existence of

serious deficiencies in that system. Despite the fact that the FRA has apparently been dealing with this problem since 2009, it cannot provide accurate information on the number of migrant children who have gone missing in the EU. There is no distinct mechanism for communicating that migrant children have gone missing – the Schengen Information System contains only 600 such files. There is no reliable information either on the number of children who have entered the EU or are present on its territory without an accompanying adult. Statistics are not kept on the overall number of children discovered, since the EU countries do not share such data either.

According to the FRA, the main reasons for the disappearance of migrant children are the lengthy procedures involved in the consideration of asylum applications, the housing of minors in closed reception centres for migrants, their fears that they will be refused asylum and their wanting to make their way to relatives living in other countries. However, the main problem, according to the FRA, is the unwillingness of States to fulfil EU legislation requirements.

I might mention that Missing Children Europe has prepared an interesting report entitled “Best practices and key challenges on interagency cooperation to safeguard unaccompanied children from going missing”. That report notes that in some EU Member States up to 50 per cent of migrants aged between 8 and 17 years go missing from reception facilities. It stands to reason that not all of them are found. People do not always look for them for that matter. There have been cases of forced separation of children and parents by criminal groups. It is impossible to assess the scale of the problem fully, since in many cases the fact that children have gone missing is hushed up.

We believe that this is a very serious problem. We are talking about migrant children going missing on a truly massive scale. Considerable effort is needed to rectify the situation, *inter alia*, the improvement by EU Member States of the national reception systems for migrants to minimize the risk of children falling into the clutches of criminal groups. Unfortunately, the strategy for the protection of the rights of unaccompanied migrant children, which should have been prepared by the European Commission back in May 2015, has still not been published.

We consider it important to use the opportunities provided by the OSCE. We call on the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings to continue to pay close attention to this problem. This brings us once again to the idea of the EU inviting the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights to monitor this serious problem on the territory of Member States so as to draw up recommendations for the European Commission.

Thank you for your attention.