

PC.DEL/315/17  
10 March 2017

ENGLISH  
Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,  
AT THE 1136th MEETING OF THE  
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

9 March 2017

**On the rights of refugee children along migration routes to Europe**

Mr. Chairperson,

We should like to draw the attention of participating States to the recent report by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which deals with refugee children from the Middle East and North Africa, their adversities on the way to Europe and often the unenviable fate that awaits them in the countries of the European Union. We have already spoken on a number of occasions about the root causes of the dire situation that has led to the exodus of refugees from this region, and we will not repeat them today.

Many refugees choose the shortest but also the most dangerous route – across the Mediterranean Sea. According to the report, in 2016 almost 26,000 children came over to Europe in this way. According to unofficial data, this number could be three times higher. Seven hundred children died on the route from Libya to Italy alone. Every nine out of ten minors who arrived on the European shore were unaccompanied by their parents.

These are dry but terrible statistics. In the absence or because of the lack of legal and safe channels for the movement and reception of migrants in EU countries, refugees are forced to choose this hazardous route and resort to the services of traffickers and illegal carriers. Experts of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime note a strange paradox: the expansion of assistance provided by the EU to Libya through coastguard services, instead of increasing the security of migration across the Mediterranean Sea, on the contrary, is significantly undermining it.

According to UNICEF, many of those attempting to come over to EU countries, including children, are subjected to violence, including sexual, threats, exploitation, psychological and physical humiliation. A total of 1 in every 21 migrants dies. According to UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Justin Forsyth, "the Central Mediterranean Sea Route is now a thoroughly criminalized enterprise with children and women bearing the cost."

At the same time, we must pay tribute to the dedication of the sailors from the coastal border services of several Mediterranean countries in Europe, who are doing everything possible to save these people.

At various international forums, including the OSCE, we have repeatedly drawn attention to the need to create in Europe, primarily in the EU countries, safe and legal migration channels. UNICEF also calls for this in the report, noting that all these measures must be taken in the best interests of children fleeing armed conflict, persecution and violence in search of a better life on the other side of the Mediterranean.

However, we are witnessing the opposite. The rhetoric of European politicians does not correspond to real action. And it is becoming more and more tough and, frankly, migrantophobic. Experts and human rights organizations note the sharp deterioration of the psychological climate in the receiving States, the growth of anti-migrant sentiments and manifestations of xenophobia, racism and radical nationalism.

Against this background, other statistics concerning migrant children missing in the EU area are indicative. For example, the European Federation of Non-Governmental Organizations “Missing Children Europe”, with reference to the International Criminal Police Organization, cites the following data. In 2015, more than 10,000 unaccompanied children went missing in the EU immediately after registering their arrival. Since then, only a few have been found. In a number of EU countries, seven to eight unaccompanied children disappear every week from their place of residence, and in some countries up to 28 children disappear each day. In 2016, the number of missing reached the thousands. In this case we are often talking about children aged 13 years and under. Where are these children now? What is happening to them? The answers to these questions must be found as soon as possible.

There are cases in some EU countries where disappearances of children have started to decline, but only because the authorities of these States have gone to such extreme measures as to temporarily place children in police stations, often together with adult criminals. As they say, this speaks for itself.

In this regard, we should again like to urge participating States to meet their international obligations to protect the human rights of migrants, especially children as the most vulnerable to violence. The OSCE specialized structures should render the necessary assistance in providing such protection.

Thank you for your attention.