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Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
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AT THE 1239th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

5 September 2019

On protests in Russia

Mr. Chairperson,

Peaceful demonstrations are a natural occurrence in a democratic society. Those who take part in them are manifesting their active citizenship. Russian citizens are no exception in that regard: their right to peaceful assembly is enshrined in Article 31 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation. Ensuring those rights is part of the obligations of the authorities. However, no one has the right to violate standards set by law. The rules for consultation on the place of a public assembly exist, first and foremost, to ensure the safety of citizens and uphold public order.

It is true that at the end of July and in August a number of protest rallies took place in Moscow that had been organized by unregistered candidates for the Moscow City Duma election. Some rallies were co-ordinated in advance with the local authorities following the established procedure, while several others did not receive the permissions required under the aforementioned rules.

Those rallies that had been co-ordinated with the municipal administration took place without any significant disturbances. As for the events that had not been approved, the law enforcement agencies of Moscow repeatedly issued warnings about their illegality and appealed to the organizers to refrain from going ahead with them. Those appeals were disregarded.

The Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights is currently collecting and analysing information about the protests that took place. As is also known, the Council has requested the senior management of the law enforcement agencies to provide relevant clarifications.

It must also be said, though, that the participants in the illegal rallies by no means behaved peacefully all the time. Using force, they tried to break through the police cordon and obstruct traffic on one of the capital's central streets, namely Tverskaya. Some of them used obscene and derogatory language towards the police and fired pepper spray into their faces, causing injuries to at least six law enforcement officers. Moreover, some utterly outrageous incidents were also registered – for example, when one of the participants in an illegal rally used social media to exhort people to “kill the children of the Russian National Guard soldiers after identifying their fathers”.

In this respect, it is worth quoting the words of the head of the Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights, Mikhail Fedotov, who said that “if one fights for one’s rights while complying with the law, then one can achieve a lot, but if one acts against the law, nothing but lawlessness will come out of it”.

More generally, it should be noted that the protests in Moscow are not something unique. For that reason, it is bizarre to hear the criticisms levelled at Russia and its law enforcement agencies by a number of countries in the European Union (EU), the United States of America, Canada and others. When dispersing the “gilets jaunes” demonstrations, the French police have over several months been using violent methods, including tear gas and rubber bullets. Meanwhile, also in France, water cannons and tear gas were actively deployed by the custodians of public order against hundreds of demonstrators during the marches of anti-globalization protesters that took place in Bayonne on 24 July. Among other recent examples of extremely harsh treatment being meted out to demonstrators by the law enforcement bodies we may cite the events of July in Puerto Rico and the Hawaiian Islands (United States) and the “coal protests” of June in North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany). In Canada, disturbances during demonstrations are punishable by long prison sentences, even going as far as life imprisonment.

It is, furthermore, surprising that the EU delegation should have delivered a statement on this current topic. Ensuring the right to freedom of assembly in the EU itself, notably within the meaning of Article 4 of the Treaty on European Union, does after all fall within the remit of its Member States and is meant to be regulated by national legislation, not by Brussels. The impression one gets is that you are keen to keep an eye on what is happening in that regard outside your association but not inside it.

And here is one more aspect. Our Western colleagues love to discourse on propaganda and electoral interference. As it happens, during the protests in Moscow, the United States and Germany used their information resources precisely to carry out propaganda activities and attempt to meddle in our country’s domestic affairs. I refer, in particular, to the German Government-funded broadcaster Deutsche Welle, which engaged in open agitation on the day of the rallies, publishing incendiary material in Russian under such slogans as “Muscovites, get out on the streets!” and “Moscow, come out!”. The US embassy in Moscow posted a detailed route and timetable of the rallies on social media, while US diplomats spontaneously offered their comments on unsanctioned demonstrations. It would seem that the US and German Governments have embraced the principle from George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* that “All ... are equal, but some ... more equal than others.”

Thank you for your attention.