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**STATEMENT BY
MR. ANDREY KELIN, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 945th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

21 March 2013

Regarding the Waffen SS march in Riga

Mr. Chairperson,

We are forced once again to draw the attention of the Permanent Council to the march held in Riga last Saturday, 16 March, by former Latvian Waffen SS legionnaires and their supporters. On the eve of that event, meetings and concerts were held in honour of the legionnaires, in addition to which there was a commemorative event at the memorial in the cemetery in Lestene, where former members of the SS are buried. What is more, events of this kind took place not only in the Latvian capital. For the first time following a long interval, Waffen SS legionnaires were also honoured in the city of Liepaja.

A particularly alarming fact is the participation in the march of members of the Saeima (Latvian Parliament) from the governing coalition. The honouring by these officials of members of the criminal SS organization condemned under a ruling by the Nuremberg Tribunal cannot be seen as anything other than a mockery of the memory of the victims of Nazism. This is proof of the ongoing pursuit by the Latvian leadership of its policy of glorifying Nazism and justifying the atrocities of the Latvian Volunteer SS Legion despite protests from the international community and from anti-fascist forces in Latvia itself, including Jewish organizations. What is also regrettable is that more and more young people are being attracted to these “brown marches”.

Neo-Nazi marches, the glorification of former members of the SS and their supporters, who under the slogan of the theory of “racial supremacy” killed millions of men and women, are nothing more than a way of propagandizing racist notions and have nothing in common either with freedom of assembly or with freedom of expression. Attempts to portray the Latvian Waffen SS legionnaires as “freedom fighters” are inadmissible. These persons distinguished themselves not by their exploits on the field of battle but by mass reprisals against peaceful citizens and punitive actions in Belarus, Russia and Poland, not to mention the extermination of the Baltic Jews.

Also regrettable is the fact that in Estonia, Latvia’s neighbour, as recently as 26 February the head of government invited to an official reception members of the Freedom

Fighters' Union, a body that brings together legionnaires of the 20th SS division. During that event, according to a statement released by the press service of the Estonian Government, the legionnaires were thanked "for their deeds performed decades ago" and for "preserving the national idea and honour of the fatherland". We are all well aware of the nature of those deeds.

It should also be noted that Nazi criminals have long had a sense of impunity in the Baltic countries. On the other hand, anti-fascist veterans are persecuted along with men and women who do not agree with the official reading of history.

Gatherings of Nazi sympathizers with the participation of deputies from the governing coalition and the high-level honouring of Waffen SS legionnaires represent an overt challenge to the international community. We are faced here with a clear disregard for United Nations General Assembly resolutions on the inadmissibility of practices that contribute to fuelling contemporary forms of racism and xenophobia, and also the recommendations of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance.

We think it useful to note that the countries mentioned in this statement are parties to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which calls for the condemnation of all forms of propaganda and all organizations that are based on ideas of racial superiority or that attempt to justify it, and also declares as a criminal offence participation in such organizations or activities.

A tolerant attitude towards facts attesting to a glorification of Nazis can only encourage the growth of neo-Nazism and xenophobia. Unfortunately, actions of this kind continue to remain outside the attention of the European Union and the European Parliament, which usually monitor carefully the situation with regard to human rights violations – albeit not at home but in other countries.

We call on the relevant OSCE institutions to provide a proper assessment of the actions of the Latvian and Estonian authorities in glorifying members of the SS condemned by the Nuremberg Tribunal and justifying their behaviour.

In conclusion, we should like to reiterate our willingness to engage in an exchange of experience in combating and preventing the rise of neo-Nazism, and also to assure you of our readiness to further assist the OSCE in its efforts to combat aggressive nationalism.

Thank you for your attention.