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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1139th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

30 March 2017

**In response to the statements by the representatives of the
United States of America and the European Union on the protests in Russia**

Mr. Chairperson,

Protests were indeed held in a number of Russian cities on 26 March. The majority of the demonstrations proceeded peacefully, without any serious violations. Furthermore, the essence of the complaints to the authorities and the course of the protests were covered in the Russian media. Where did you see any infringement of the right to freedom of assembly or freedom of information?

The fact is that there are quite a number of legitimate questions regarding these actions. We consider it absolutely unacceptable that many minors were involved in the rallies, often through deceptive means. For example, there are reports that they were promised money if they took part in the protests. In fact, the organizers of the demonstrations used children as a shield, exposing them to danger. Many teenagers deliberately picked fights with the police in order to appear on camera among the people detained.

The deliberate creation of dangerous situations is confirmed, in particular, by the refusal of the organizers in a number of cities to hold the protests and marches in the places agreed upon with the authorities, as prescribed by Russian law. One has the feeling that the people organizing the protests deliberately aimed to provoke matters so as create a big hullabaloo, which the Western countries seized on with pleasure.

As for the rally in Moscow, its organizers also rejected two squares proposed by the capital's authorities, insisting on holding the event in the very heart of the city. Later, they released disinformation saying that the city authorities had offered no alternatives at all. The day before, on 24 March, the Prosecutor's Office of the Central Administrative District of Moscow had warned the organizers against breaking the law. However, Alexei Navalny, who has been mentioned here, called via social media for this warning to be ignored. I wonder how those countries that are in solidarity with him here would react to public calls for their laws to be broken.

Other violations also occurred during some of the rallies, including the spraying of tear gas into the crowd (gas pistols were confiscated from a number of protesters), insults and attacks, and inflicting bodily harm on police officers. Journalists were injured by bottles thrown by demonstrators. It is clear that by no means all the actions can be called peaceful.

In that connection, the law enforcement agencies were forced to detain a number of people. They were taken to police stations to complete reports concerning administrative, I emphasize, not criminal offences. Those who have spoken here today appear to forget the main thing – the rule on gaining approval for places for demonstrations and routes of marches exists primarily for the purpose of ensuring the safety of citizens and law and order.

As for the police, their actions were in strict accordance with the law. I will not go into details now as to how in a number of countries of the European Union and in the United States of America the police deal with protesters who violate the rules for holding public assemblies – sound cannons, truncheons, rubber bullets and tear gas are used. We have observed this on a number of occasions, including quite recently. We hope that our colleagues have not yet had time to forget that two months ago during demonstrations on the occasion of the inauguration of the President of the United States the police detained over 200 people, among them were also journalists, including the Russia Today television correspondent Alexander Rubenstein, against whom charges of involvement in mass disturbances were brought. We also remember how the Occupy Wall Street movement was dispersed in 2012. Seven hundred people were detained in one hour. City buses removed from service were brought in to transport them. There are images on the Internet of a police officer dousing demonstrators with pepper spray. We did not hear any condemnation of these actions. So the loud statements by the representatives of the United States and the EU are a classic example of double standards.

During his recent visit to Macedonia, the European Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Johannes Hahn, said: “The freedom of assembly and the freedom of expression are fundamental rights in democratic societies, but they come with responsibilities.” Why, then, in the case of Russia does the distinguished representative of the European Union say nothing about responsibility? Why do we not hear the United States and the members of the EU voice concerns, for example, about the violence used these days to disperse the demonstrators protesting in France against police brutality?

As for combating corruption, it is noteworthy that in February of this year the European Commission decided to abandon the practice of preparing anti-corruption reports. Obviously, it is easier for Brussels to look for problems outside the EU than at home.

In conclusion, I should like to call for an end to distorting facts, submitting one-sided information, applying double standards and simply being hypocritical. And there is no need to issue a political order for feigned care for the Russian people. Our people elected the current government by democratic means and the overwhelming majority continue to support it, including in its firm intention to ensure law and order in accordance with the law.

Thank you for your attention.