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**STATEMENT BY
MR. ALEKSANDR VOLGAREV, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1389th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

15 September 2022

On violations by Latvia of its OSCE commitments related to the protection of historical monuments and sites of remembrance

Mr. Chairperson,

The widespread campaign launched by the authorities in the Baltic States and Poland to demolish Soviet monuments took a dangerous turn long ago and one that runs counter to these countries' international commitments. Latvia is sadly ahead of the rest in this regard. The leadership of that country is literally trying to erase the material embodiment of the memory of those who gave their lives in the struggle for the freedom and independence of the peoples of Europe from fascism.

The most egregious example of this "war" on memorials was the dismantling of the monument to the Soviet soldier-liberators in Riga in late August. It was carried out in defiance of the country's international obligations and despite long-standing protests by citizens. We would remind you that the United Nations Human Rights Committee declared these actions to be unlawful and called on the Latvian authorities to stop the destruction of Soviet memorials.

However, the Latvian Government did not simply ignore this prescription by the United Nations. It has gone further than that, embarking on reprisals against war graves. Previously, the country's officials had repeatedly provided assurances of the inviolability of the graves. But "political expediency" spurred on by Russophobia has once again prevailed.

The Latvian authorities recently informed their Russian counterparts about the exhumation of the remains, from 29 August to 4 September, of 137 Red Army soldiers and officers buried in the cemetery of brothers in arms in the village of Rudbārži (Kuldīga municipality).

The Latvian Government has taken this cynical step without consulting with Russia, although such consultation was stipulated in the relevant bilateral intergovernmental agreement of 2007. Article 4 of that legally binding instrument makes it clear that the reburial of remains may take place only with the agreement of both contracting parties. Our country has not agreed to the exhumation and reburial of these remains. This subject has never once been raised in bilateral contacts. Moreover, we have yet to hear an explanation as to the reasons for this step. The fate of the burial site and the graves of the Red Army soldiers

and officers also remains unclear. We should like to receive an explanation from the authorities in Riga on this matter.

Such unilateral and arbitrary actions by Latvia with regard to historical memorials and burial sites run counter to a number of CSCE/OSCE commitments.

Paragraph 31 of the 1991 Document of the Cracow Symposium on the Cultural Heritage of the CSCE Participating States stresses that they “will strive to preserve and protect those monuments and sites of remembrance, including most notably extermination camps, and the related archives, which are themselves testimonials to tragic experiences in their common past. Such steps need to be taken in order that those experiences may be remembered, may help to teach present and future generations about these events, and thus ensure that they are never repeated.” Furthermore, paragraph 32 of the Document states that “the interpretation of sensitive sites of remembrance can serve as a valuable means of promoting tolerance and understanding among people and will take into account social and cultural diversity.”

Latvia’s leadership continues to sow discord within Latvian society as well, destabilizing and dividing it with its unsavoury stunts. This goes against numerous commitments, including those of our Organization, on tolerance and non-discrimination. In particular, the Helsinki Document adopted at the CSCE Summit of 1992 refers to “the vital role of tolerance, mutual understanding and co-operation in the achievement and preservation of stable democratic societies”. It is emphasized that “freedom and tolerance must be taught and practised.”

Mr. Chairperson,

It is clear that, in a fit of Russophobia, Latvia – just like the other Baltic States and Poland – is violating a much wider range of international commitments. These incidents are reflected, in particular, in the annual reports of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including the recently published document on the situation regarding the glorification of Nazism and the spread of neo-Nazism. You are strongly advised to familiarize yourselves with it.

Mr. Chairperson,

The Latvian Government’s actions against Soviet monuments and gravesites have a distinctly anti-Russian motivation and are frequently accompanied by neo-Nazi manifestations and the glorification of Nazism.

Unfortunately, these grotesque measures being taken with regard to the Soviet historical and memorial heritage continue to gain traction in the political environment. The complete connivance of the official Latvian authorities also contributes greatly to this. We believe that these issues should not remain without a proper response from the international community, including the OSCE.

Thank you for your attention.