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Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY  
MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE  
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1351st MEETING OF THE  
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

20 January 2022

**On ongoing violations of human rights in Estonia**

Mr. Chairperson,

We have repeatedly drawn attention to the gross and systematic infringements of human rights and fundamental freedoms by Estonia. There is a very wide range of human rights violations here – trampling on the rights of national minorities, attacks on freedom of expression, persecution of human rights defenders and dissidents, glorification of Nazism at the State level, and much more besides.

A separate issue, of course, is the continuing shameful phenomenon of mass statelessness in this Member State of the European Union, as a result of which some 70,000 people (or 6 per cent of the country's population) are deprived of many fundamental rights and freedoms. The absence of effective steps to eradicate this phenomenon suggests not only that the European Union is ignoring these egregious facts, but also that the authorities in Brussels are condoning this behaviour.

Last December, the subject of national minorities and non-citizens in Estonia was discussed during an informal Arria-formula meeting of the members of the United Nations Security Council. The situation of this category of people was perhaps most succinctly described by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on minority issues [appointed by the Human Rights Council], Fernand de Varennes: These people “don't have the right to have rights”.

The discriminatory attitude of the Estonian authorities towards the Russian-speaking population is most evident in education. What is happening should be regarded as forcible assimilation of children from the Russian-speaking population and the deliberate denial of their right to receive education in their native language. The Estonian authorities continue to take concrete steps to this end in gross violation of the country's international obligations under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, several provisions of the CSCE Copenhagen Document and the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. Not to mention the Hague Recommendations regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities published by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

(HCNM). Furthermore, the Estonian Government persistently ignores the recommendations of the relevant United Nations, Council of Europe and OSCE human rights bodies.

The aggressive de-Russification of schools has already resulted in the residents of the town of Keila lodging a complaint with the European Court of Human Rights in December 2021 about the authorities' intention to close the only Russian school in that community.

Careful consideration has been given to the draft Estonian language development plan for the period 2021–2035 submitted by the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research at the end of last year, which, incidentally, will even affect kindergartens. The document provides for transition periods, during which the amount of teaching in the Estonian language will increase and should reach 75 per cent by 2035. This means that the limit for the use of foreign languages, which includes Russian, will be reduced to 25 per cent.

In that regard, we should like to remind you that there are 78 State schools in Estonia where one can study/be taught in Russian. This represents 14 per cent of the total number of educational institutions. Given the size of the Russian-speaking population in the country, this is already a low figure. However, implementation of the aforementioned plan would mean the *de facto* elimination of opportunities for one third of the country's population to receive education in their native language. Moreover, members of the Russian-speaking diaspora are not even allowed to participate in the discussion and decision-making process that directly affects them. This is at odds with the HCNM's Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies.

The Estonian language development plan also proposes amendments to the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, which would effectively enshrine the time frame and format of the elimination of education in the Russian language. Apparently, this is in line with the long-term priorities of the Estonian leadership.

A significant proportion of the document's provisions are concerned with increasing the number of teachers and kindergarten teachers with Estonian-language skills. There are already proposals to make the employment contracts fixed-term with interim performance reviews for school directors who "stubbornly fail" to learn Estonian. Essentially, this means that, under the pretext of "insufficient knowledge" of the Estonian language, undesirable school heads, primarily heads of Russian educational institutions, can be dismissed from their posts.

All this shows that the problem of discrimination against tens of thousands of Russian-speakers in Estonia, including children, not only persists, but is rapidly deteriorating. Continuing to sweep this issue under the rug potentially puts the stability of society at risk. We call on the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities to pay close attention to the problem of violations of the educational and linguistic rights of the Russian-speaking population of Estonia. We believe that this subject could form the basis for his co-operation with the European Commission, the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights and the Council of Europe's Venice Commission.

We have repeatedly pointed out that infringements of the rights of ethnic groups are often accompanied by dangerous trends in glorifying Nazism and pandering to neo-Nazi sentiment, notably at the State level. Estonia is no exception. In the settlement of Sinimäe, in particular, gatherings regularly take place of admirers of the 20th Waffen Grenadier Division of the SS (most recently in July 2021). There are attempts to falsify history; there is whitewashing of Estonian collaborators and glorification of the Forest Brothers; monuments are erected to those directly involved in Nazi formations, and many other things.

Another set of problems is connected with the nefarious practice of gross and systematic violations of the rights of media representatives, including the right to free access to information, under the guise of alleged threats to national security. The latest outrageous instance of this nature was the refusal to issue an entry visa to Anatoly Samokhvalov, a Russian sports journalist from the RIA Novosti news agency, to cover the European Figure Skating Championship, which we all recently followed with pleasure. The response from the authorities was that the reporter “poses a threat to public order and internal security”. One can only wonder what kind of threat a sports correspondent, who has incidentally had no problems entering Estonia before, could pose to this NATO member country.

Once again, we call on the authorities in Tallinn to put a stop to their discriminatory policy towards the Russian-speaking population and journalists and to start fulfilling the country’s international obligations. If, for some reason or another, the authorities are unable to do this, we believe that the European Union, which is so concerned about respect for human rights beyond its borders, should offer the republic all the support it can.

Thank you for your attention.