

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1186th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

17 May 2018

On the violation of human rights in Latvia

Mr. Chairperson,

In spite of our numerous discussions in the OSCE Permanent Council, the human rights situation in Latvia continues to deteriorate. No one is listening to us – or else they don't want to hear us.

Freedom of the media is restricted. In early May the Saeima of Latvia approved at the first reading amendments to the law increasing the quota of television programmes in the languages of the European Union to 90 per cent. According to Inese Lībiņa-Egnere, chairperson of the Saeima National Security Committee, this action is supposed to be a preventive measure to combat so-called Russian propaganda. If the amendments enter into force, it will make it possible to exclude the majority of television channels and programmes in Russian from the basic television packages offered by cable operators. In this way, a significant proportion of the Russian-speaking viewers in Latvia could be deprived of the possibility of watching Russian television channels and programmes offered in the basic and most readily accessible packages. This is a blatant violation of freedom of speech and the right to choose the source of information and the latest example of trampling on the interests of the Russian-speaking population of Latvia. The authorities in Riga evidently wish to restrict the possibility for access to an alternative point of view and to confine society to the official narrative.

Gatis Kokins, chairman of the telecommunications company Lattelecom, has stated that “three quarters of its customers have reacted very negatively to the prospect that there might not be Russian channels in the basic package.” He added that the decision to close or ban anything in Latvia was not the best way to combat propaganda.

Latvia is one of the OSCE countries where discriminatory laws have been adopted on a large scale to remove dissent from the media landscape. It pursues a policy of “simplification” in which there is room for only two types of information: the “bad” type, meaning anything positive about Russia, and the “good” type, meaning criticism – bordering on a smear campaign – of that country.

I should now like to turn to discrimination in education and the persecution of defenders of the rights of national minorities. At the Permanent Council meeting of 3 May we condemned the detention of Alexander Gaponenko, the well-known human rights activist, public figure and co-chairman of the United Congress of Russian Communities and chairman of the Congress of Non-Citizens, and the absurd charges against him.

Barely a week ago, the Latvian security police started criminal proceedings against the chairperson of the Latvian Russian Union and former member of the European Parliament Tatiana Zhdanok, who was summoned for questioning on 7 May. The morbid interest in her and a number of other public figures and human rights activists was prompted by the organization by them of the All-Latvian Parents' Meeting on 31 March. The participants discussed how to maintain the right to education in Russian in view of the requirement that all secondary schools in Latvia change over to the Latvian language, in particular the amendments to the Law on Education and the Law on Basic Education.

One of the speakers was the political activist Vladimir Linderman, member of the movement in defence of Russian schools, who was demonstratively arrested on the street in Riga on 8 May by members of the Latvian security service. His lawyer Yelena Kvyatkovska has no doubt that it was because of Mr. Linderman's opposition to the official legitimization of the elimination of the Russian language from the education system. According to eyewitnesses, the arrest was extremely brutal. The police had no need to use such methods, because Mr. Linderman had never resisted the law enforcement authorities and, as had happened previously, would have come voluntarily for questioning by the police if he had received a summons to that effect. The municipal court in Riga ordered Mr. Linderman's detention in a decision on 10 May. It should be noted that the hearing was unjustifiably closed: it was not open to the public and the suspect was brought into the courtroom by a special entrance to prevent him from talking to reporters. It is worth mentioning that even the well-known Latvian journalist Lato Lapsa, who is not sympathetic to Russia, said that it was strange that Linderman had been arrested only for speaking and was being detained for no reason.

On 11 May, Miroslavs Mitrofanovs, a member of the European Parliament from Latvia, issued an open letter in which he took responsibility for the All-Latvian Parents' Meeting and offered to take the place of Mr. Gaponenko and Mr. Linderman in prison. Will you now arrest him as well?

We have heard more than once from the distinguished Latvian representatives that the education measures by the Latvian Government are supposedly designed to "ensure equal opportunities for young people to receive a quality education", and so on. In reality, such measures not only ignore the interests of a significant section of the population of Latvia but also violate international obligations and standards for protecting the rights of national minorities.

The opposition to the complete transition of schools in Latvia to the Latvian language nevertheless remains unabated. The most recent protest march against the education reforms in Latvia took place on 1 May in Riga. According to human rights activists there were around 10,000 participants. The citizens of Riga are not alone in their opposition. They are supported by the European Free Alliance, which includes parties from 45 regions with national

minorities from countries of the European Union. Moreover, 98 European national minority organizations support the Russians in Latvia.

The recent events in Latvia demonstrate the unwillingness of the Latvian Government in Riga to discuss ways of reducing inter-ethnic tension. The authorities seem to have chosen a more radical method of intimidating, with the aid of the security services, those who defend the legal rights and interests of national minorities in Latvia.

We call on the OSCE participating States, particularly the members of the European Union, and also the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Representative on Freedom of the Media, to exert their influence on Latvia to unconditionally fulfil its human rights obligations.

Thank you for your attention.