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PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF LATVIA TO THE UN
OSCE AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN VIENNA

Statement on Draft Law in Latvia “On Status of the Participants of World War II” by the Permanent Representative of Latvia, Ambassador Jānis Zlamets

Permanent Council No.1164,
Vienna, 16 November 2017

Dear Mr Chairman,

I would like to use this opportunity to reply to the statement by the Delegation of the Russian Federation made on November 9 on the draft legislation in Latvia on the Status of the Participants of World War II.

First I have to note that this legislation proposal is still only a draft. We should not prejudge results of the legislative process.

Nevertheless I would like to use this opportunity to shortly inform the Permanent Council on the substance of this proposal, since it is apparently misunderstood by Russian sources.

As you know in result of the Molotov - Ribbentrop Pact, Latvia was occupied by the Soviet Union in June 1940. A year before World War II military phase reached our country. Latvia was occupied and did not participate in World War II as a state.

However, despite of international conventions and customary international law of the time, both Nazi and Soviet occupation regimes used terror and repressions to forcibly draft people of Latvia in their military units.

Those people had little choice and their state de facto did not exist to protect them because of Soviet or Nazi occupations. The current draft legislation is a symbolic recognition of their fate by the state today.

Mr Chairman, here comes the core of my intervention.

In light of the statement by the Russian Delegation from last week it is extremely important to highlight that this draft legislation clearly states that it will not apply to those serving in the Nazi units of SS, SD and Gestapo as well as their colleagues in kind in the KGB and NKVD.

This legislation will not apply to those charged with committing crimes against humanity, war crimes and other serious crimes during World War II. It is written in black on white in Article 3 of the draft legislation. We deal with those in the Criminal Code.

In the meantime, Article 4 sets a detailed description how each individual application will be screened. Again - black on white!

While because of the occupation Latvia as a state did not participate in World War II, we have consistently condemned all crimes against humanity committed by both occupation regimes. Latvia categorically denounces the Holocaust and mourns its victims.

We take these tragic issues very seriously and, therefore, deem as inappropriate attempts by anyone to use them for rhetoric games.

Thank you, Mr Chairman!