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Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1132nd MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

2 February 2017

On the violation of the language rights of national minorities in Estonia

Mr. Chairperson,

We are once again compelled to report that the Estonian Government's official policy of the *de facto* assimilation of the Russian-speaking population, which was introduced many years ago, is continuing. This is demonstrated, for example, by the recent statement of the Estonian Minister of Education and Research, Ms. Mailis Reps, who announced plans to move 100 Estonian families to Narva in order to "balance" the national composition of this "Russian city". As we know, such ethnic "experiments" were already conducted in the twentieth century.

There are also issues in the field of minority education. The positive changes connected with the reform of Russian-language education that have emerged with the arrival of the new government in Estonia have increasingly raised questions. On the one hand, it is planned to bring back the Russian language to several high schools: three in Tallinn and one in Narva. It would seem that such an initiative could be welcomed. On the other hand, it is being carried out as part of a pilot programme that stipulates that high school graduates' knowledge of Estonian must be at C1 level – the highest for non-native speakers. Until now it has been enough to pass the B2-level exam. According to directors of local high schools, no more than 10 to 15 per cent of students will be able to take the exam under the new requirements. The authorities are trying to turn a blind eye to such information, though they acknowledge that it is one of the most sensitive issues in the implementation of the programme. Thus, the return to the provision of Russian-language education in only four of the country's educational institutions is in fact intended to disguise the sharp increase in the requirements for proficiency in the Estonian language.

Another worrying factor is the testing of the loyalty of Russian-speaking pupils in Estonia, which is supported by the Ministry of Defence as part of the "Our national defence" programme. This involves surveys of Russian-speaking young people aged 15 and above in Tallinn and north-east Estonia – a total of around 73,000 people. According to local journalists, young people are asked provocative questions – on their attitude towards Russia, the Russian-language Estonian television, Estonia's membership of NATO, its participation

in international military operations, etc. Polls, especially in Narva, showed that the majority of respondents believe co-operation and good-neighbourly relations with Russia is a fundamental guarantee of Estonia's security. However, on the basis of this peaceable position, the authorities have come to the paradoxical conclusion that in this region "there is a lesser degree of connection to the State and of loyalty to Estonia".

With regard to the discrimination of the Russian population in Estonia and the violation of its language rights, the Police and Border Guard Board also refuses to record citizens' patronymics in Estonian passports. Recently, the State Court of Estonia did not grant an appeal against the decision of the Tallinn district court, which recognized such a refusal as lawful. This decision of Estonia's highest court has outraged the country's Russian-speaking community. We recall that, in 2014, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination urged the Estonian Government to take measures towards the recognition of patronymics at the administrative level. Earlier, a similar recommendation was received from the Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

In this regard, we urge the Estonian leadership to ensure the full rights of national and linguistic minorities, in line with OSCE commitments. We hope that the Office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities will monitor this situation closely.

Thank you for your attention.