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OF CULTURE AND MEDIA OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT
THE OSCE CONFERENCE ON TOLERANCE AND THE FIGHT
AGAINST RACISM, XENOPHOBIA AND DISCRIMINATION**

Brussels, 13 and 14 September 2004

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear friends,

Under present-day conditions, it is not enough to publicly condemn acts of racism and xenophobia and to adopt anti-discrimination laws. It is necessary that principles of tolerance be recognized by as many people as possible, that they become part of their culture and world view, and that they reach the younger generation through the way young people are brought up and educated.

It is important for us to realize that religious and ethnic diversity in the OSCE area is a precious asset for all of its peoples. The OSCE is endeavouring to make Europe a community of nations that preserve their cultural and historical identity but at the same time are united by common humanitarian values. The immediate and total rejection of any form of racism, xenophobia or discrimination on ethnic grounds must become the rule for this kind of community. There is no place here for a policy of double standards. We are therefore alarmed that while it is possible to solve the problems of the Albanian population in Macedonia, in certain Baltic countries the Russian-speaking population is the victim of discrimination. In particular, I should like to use this platform to draw the attention of European organizations to the dangerous disregard shown by the Latvian authorities for the numerous recommendations put forward by distinguished international bodies concerning the adoption of measures on the education of ethnic minorities in the Latvian Republic. The responsibility for worsening inter-ethnic relations in Latvia rests with the nationalistic forces in the Latvian Government, whose short-sighted policy regarding the Russian-speaking population can have dangerous consequences far beyond Latvia's borders.

In our view, this is essentially also the position of the Estonian authorities, who are in effect encouraging the actions of certain municipal and public bodies through whose efforts monuments to Nazism are being erected in the Estonian Republic. And this is happening in a year when all of mankind is preparing to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the victory over the brown plague.

The Russian Federation takes the view that the tasks of eradicating racial and ethnic prejudice, and of combating hatred for reasons of a person belonging to a particular ethnic, religious or linguistic group, must be tackled both by each country on its own and through the joint, co-ordinated efforts of the world community as a whole.

The OSCE is, in co-operation with the Council of Europe, a very important instrument for developing international standards and mechanisms for countering negative phenomena. In fact, within the framework of the OSCE, conferences and meetings on the subject of tolerance and the fight against racism, xenophobia and discrimination are becoming a regular occurrence. Russia is studying the experience gained by European countries in these matters. Of particular interest to us are the key areas of the Belgian Government's federal policy on combating manifestations of racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia: the loss of civil and political rights by persons who have been found guilty of violating anti-racism laws; the monitoring of Internet sites that propagandize hatred and violence on grounds of racism and anti-Semitism; a ban on the dissemination of racist information through the channels of State enterprises; educational work by the print and electronic media, public associations and institutions of learning; and targeted re-training programmes for police officers and judges.

As you are aware, the citizens of my country represent some 160 nationalities. The Constitution and laws of the Russian Federation forbid discrimination on ethnic and religious grounds and guarantee citizens the right to pursue their ethnic and cultural interests.

In June of this year, President Putin of the Russian Federation approved the new version of the federal Ethno-Cultural Autonomy Act. The Russian Federation's ministry for National Policy has now been re-established. One of its tasks is to assist the Government and civil society in countering manifestations of racism, xenophobia and discrimination.

At the present time in Russia, those involved in implementing the ethno-cultural policy, which is aimed at strengthening civil society and opposing nationalism, fundamentalism, religious fanaticism and terrorism, include: 315 local, 173 regional and 15 federal ethno-cultural autonomous entities as well as a number of ethno-cultural centres and other public organizations, among them the Association of Indigenous Peoples of Small Number in the North and Far East of Russia and in Siberia, the Russian Congress of Finno-Ugric Peoples, the Union of the Russian Diasporas, the International Union of German Culture, the All-Russian Association of Koreans, and others. Taking only the national languages of the peoples inhabiting the Russian Federation, there are more than 1,600 printed publications.

That having been said, we must pay constant attention to the problems of inter-ethnic and inter-faith relations and to the development of tolerance in society, all the more since small isolated groups of youths with aggressive hooligan tendencies can still be encountered.

At times, short-sighted politicians attempt to exploit ethnic issues and certain parts of the media add fuel to the fire. The need here is for a prompt and decisive response from the Government. For this purpose, Russia has put into place a legal mechanism for countering extremist activities and the inflammation of inter-ethnic discord, but, I repeat, the most effective instrument in the long term for countering xenophobia should be the education of young citizens in a spirit of tolerance and respect for ethnic diversity. The Russian Government's main task at the moment is, first and foremost, the training of teachers. This

training is being provided through the holding of practical and theoretical conferences, seminars, discussions and “round tables”, all of which are contributing to the promotion of attitudes of tolerance.

The Russian Federation is operating at the federal level a specific programme entitled “The Development of a Tolerant Consciousness and the Prevention of Extremism”. This programme, together with other measures, aims at incorporating in the educational curricula for Russian students of all ages ideas and attitudes concerning religious and ethnic tolerance. The aims of the programme are to:

- Establish an academically sound, methodological, organizational and legal basis aimed at instilling the norms of tolerant behaviour in human relations;
- Establish an effective monitoring system and mechanisms for devising measures for the timely countering of extremism, involving the media and socio-political action;
- Introduce at all levels of the education system academic programmes on the development of tolerant attitudes and behaviour;
- Put into place conditions for affirming the principles of tolerance in society.

I have no intention of hiding the fact that the Government of the Russian Federation is concerned at isolated instances of violence and behaviour by members of the armed forces that is not in accordance with the code of military conduct. It is hardly a secret, after all, that attitudes in a military environment are the clearest gauge of attitudes in civil society.

We intend in the near future, together with the Chief Directorate of Educational Work of the Ministry of Defence, to begin systematic work on cultivating tolerant attitudes among servicemen. As a first step, we plan to develop a programme involving training sessions and video-based courses on the distinctive features of the rules of social behaviour for different ethnic groups and the psychology of the peoples of Russia. This will help young people serving in a military unit to better understand one another’s behavioural motivation and will contribute to an atmosphere of tolerance and mutual respect.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you are aware, a series of monstrous terrorist acts has recently shaken Russia. I should like to express my gratitude to all the countries and peoples that have shared with us our pain at the tragic events in the Northern Caucasus. One thing that stands out in all of this, however, is the way the Beslan tragedy has been covered in certain media and particularly the vocabulary used to refer to the perpetrators of this monstrous act of terrorism. For certain United States and British publications, the terrorists continue to be “insurgents” or “fighters”, while for certain French media they are “people who seized the school”.

The question as to what atrocities these “insurgents” still have to commit before people finally stop talking about their “struggle for independence” in a sympathetic manner remains open.

Some foreign political scientists are attempting to push the view that Russia is witnessing a rapid spread of Islamic extremism and that, as a result, the conditions for a growth in islamophobia are being created.

Some 10 per cent of Russian citizens are descendants of people who for centuries were followers of Islam, but a direct parallel cannot be drawn between Islam and terrorism in Russia. The Central Asian States and other countries in the Islamic world are in fact co-operating in the fight against religious extremism and terrorism.

For a number of years, the Government has been helping to finance measures to support the ethnic cultures of the peoples residing in the Russian Federation: Slavs, people from the Caucasus, Mongolians, the Turkic and Finno-Ugric peoples and others, including other small indigenous nations.

The experience of mankind shows just how hopeless and dangerous it is to promote confrontation between ethnic cultures and traditions, something that can only lead directly to national strife.

In 2005, the world will mark the sixtieth anniversary of the victory over the misanthropic monster of fascism. We remember how many people gave their lives for that victory and what incalculable misfortunes were visited by Nazism on the peoples of Europe and the entire world. Our multi-ethnic nation alone lost 20 million people. We are honour-bound not to permit fascism, racism or anti-Semitism.

Thank you for your attention.