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**ADDITIONAL REMARKS BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE
1316th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL
VIA VIDEO TELECONFERENCE**

27 May 2021

Human rights violations in Latvia

Madam Chairperson,

I should like to comment on a number of issues mentioned by the distinguished representative of Latvia.

She says that all is well in her country when it comes to upholding human rights. But what should one then make of the masses of observations addressed to Latvia at the United Nations in connection with the Universal Periodic Review in early May? A broad range of representatives of the international community highlighted various problems, including discrimination against national and linguistic minorities, the persistence of the phenomenon of statelessness, and so on. A total of 244 recommendations were issued, which is an awful lot for such a small country.

Turning now separately to the glorification of Nazism in Latvia. One should not distort history in an attempt to cover up an ugly truth. Allow me to remind you whom you are promoting to the ranks of national heroes. For example, let us consider again the members of the Latvian Legion of the SS. That unit subsumed all of the Latvian police battalions that took part in the punitive actions on the territory of Belorussia, Russia, Ukraine, Lithuania and Poland. One of these actions was Operation “Winterzauber”, an anti-partisan operation conducted on the territory of modern-day Russia and Belarus. Seven Latvian police battalions participated in the operation, its members subsequently becoming part of the SS Legion. Several hundred villages were destroyed in the course of the operation. At least 12,000 civilians were shot dead or burned alive, more than 2,000 of whom were children under 12 years of age. Around 15,000 civilians were sent to work in Germany and in the Salaspils concentration camp. The Latvian Legion of the SS also absorbed members of the notorious Arajs Kommando. The latter did the Nazis’ most dirty work for them. According to various data, between 26,000 and 60,000 Jews were killed by members of the Kommando.

These are just some individual facts concerning their atrocities, on account of which it is impossible to regard the members of the Latvian Legion of the SS as “victims of circumstances”. The same is true of the Forest Brothers. Based on official data alone, during the period from 1945 to 1953, that is, in peacetime, 2,208 people in Latvia fell victim to these so-called “national partisans”. Among the victims were civilians, including women, children and elderly people.

Incidentally, the Forest Brothers, or, rather, “Forest Monsters”, received active assistance from the intelligence services of some Western countries, which benefited from the presence of subversive forces on the territory of the USSR. These facts are also corroborated by declassified CIA materials.

As for discrimination against national minorities: in addition to the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, other international human rights organizations have also voiced criticisms of the country’s educational reforms. This is particularly the case with the Council of Europe – a resolution of the Committee of Ministers on the implementation of the Council’s Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities calls for “ensur[ing] the continued availability of teaching and learning in languages of national minorities throughout the country with a view to meeting existing demand”, thereby taking account of the negative impact of political measures of a prohibitive nature on the opportunities of those for whom Latvian is not their mother tongue.

A similar approach underlies a report by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatović, in which a recommendation is issued to Latvia to protect the rights of minorities and defuse tensions in society, given that the rights of citizens speaking minority languages are not taken into consideration in that country and the laws are often executed by coercive means. The so-called education reform in Latvia has also been criticized by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, in whose view switching entirely to teaching in the Latvian language at national minority schools would move Latvia away from its existing bilingual model of education, which fulfils its functions well and is based on The Hague Recommendations regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities.

The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has expressed its concern over Latvia’s education policy. In concluding observations dated 25 September 2018, it unequivocally stated that the ongoing “Latvianization” of schools and kindergartens amounts to discrimination. It noted that “the current language policies discriminate against ethnic minorities in the [field] of education.” The Committee also drew the Latvian Government’s attention to the necessity to “take measures to ensure that its language policy and laws do not create direct or indirect discrimination or restrict the rights of ethnic minorities to access education”. This body also recommended that Latvia should “ensure that there are no undue restrictions on access to education in minority languages” and “reconsider the necessity of amendments to the Law on Education that create further restrictions on the number of lessons of minority language in public and private schools”.

Furthermore, in 2020, the United Nations Forum on Minority Issues clearly asserted: “All States, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, civil society and other entities working on the rights of minorities should make efforts to raise awareness about the benefits of education in, and the teaching of, the mother tongue, as well as the benefits of multilingualism. [...] States should provide access to education in, and the teaching of, minority languages, in order to ensure equality among people from different linguistic backgrounds. [...] States should avoid any restrictions on education in, and the teaching of, minority languages. States should refrain from forced assimilation of minorities, *inter alia*, through the prohibition of education in, or the teaching of, the mother tongue of minorities.”

I would emphasize that the discriminatory steps taken by the Latvian Government violate a number of its obligations under international law – for example, Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, whereby “persons belonging to ... minorities shall not be denied the right ... to enjoy their own culture ... or to use their own language”; Article 5 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which lays down that “States Parties undertake to prohibit and to eliminate racial discrimination in all its forms ... without distinction as to ... national or ethnic origin, ... notably in the enjoyment of ... the right to education and training”; and Article 5 of the

UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education, which recognizes “the right of members of national minorities to carry on their own educational activities, including ... the use or the teaching of their own language”. The Government of Latvia is also failing to comply with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (1992), not to mention the country’s very own Constitution.

We have already discussed the issue of suppression of Russian media and Russian-language media on a number of occasions here. I shall not repeat myself.

In that respect, I urge my Latvian colleague not to engage in wishful thinking, for discrimination against national minorities is in full swing in her country, where Nazi accomplices are being glorified as well. It is time to face up to the truth and start changing things.

Thank you for your attention.