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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1181st MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

12 April 2018

On the continuing “war” against monuments in Poland

Mr. Chairperson,

Despite Russia’s repeated and urgent appeals, including at the OSCE Permanent Council, the Polish authorities continue their barbaric actions with regard to the heritage of monuments and the historical memory of the entire Polish people.

The campaign to demolish monuments to Soviet soldiers has intensified of late. This has happened primarily following the adoption in December 2017 of amendments to the law banning propaganda of communism or other totalitarian regimes (the so-called “decommunization law”).

The Polish Government effectively gave the local authorities an ultimatum, requiring them to remove all “improper” monuments by 31 March 2018. Those who carried out this task were told that the national budget would compensate them for the demolition costs. Those who failed to meet the set deadline would be forced to proceed with demolition but at their own expense.

Since last summer, when we once again raised the issue of mass demolition in Poland of monuments to fallen Red Army soldiers (at the Permanent Council meeting of 6 July), the situation has continued to worsen. In this period, 23 cases of the Polish authorities dismantling monuments to Soviet liberator soldiers were registered.

One of these cases was the desecration of a monument to Soviet soldiers in the town of Szczyrk. The monument honoured 36 Red Army soldiers who died fighting to liberate the town from Nazi occupation in February 1945. Another case occurred in Sarnica, where vandals damaged a monument raised at the site of the heroic deaths of Soviet reconnaissance officers who were carrying out a combat mission during the Red Army’s operation to liberate Poland from Nazi occupation. Another despicable act was the desecration on 22 January 2018 of a monument of gratitude to the Red Army in the town of Olsztyn. What’s more, this took place on the date commemorating the town’s liberation by Soviet soldiers.

Here are a few recent examples of these lawless acts. Over the past few days there have been reports about the demolition of monuments of gratitude to the Red Army in the towns of Oleśnica, Legnica, Czeladź, Szczecin and Strzelce Krajeńskie.

In total, around 230 monuments are slated for demolition – this is the figure provided by the Polish Institute of National Remembrance. Particularly shameful are attempts to justify the demolition of monuments that those who survived the war erected in memory of their fallen comrades, on the basis of these memorials' supposed "unaesthetic aspect".

We again call on the Polish authorities to stop demolishing memorials to those who sacrificed their lives for the Polish people and brought freedom to the inmates of Nazi concentration camps. We recall that yesterday, 11 April, we marked International Day of liberation of the Nazi concentration camps, and this makes this issue we have raised today more relevant than ever.

We also expect the Polish Government to take effective measures to prevent desecration of military burial sites. Existing figures show that in 2015–2016 Poland accounted for 53 out of 79 cases of unlawful action against Soviet memorial sites beyond Russia's borders. Most of these cases concerned military cemeteries. These figures are outrageous and there is no moral justification for them in any way or form. As these examples show, the campaign against the common military-historical heritage in Poland is picking up pace. We believe that such acts of vandalism are akin to neo-Nazism in nature. And to our regret, the Polish authorities either give these acts their blessing or stand idly by.

In this context, the Polish authorities' effective encouragement of marches by nationalists, the most recent of which took place in Warsaw on 11 November 2017, stands out. Various estimates suggest that between 60,000 and 100,000 people took part. Calls bordering on anti-Semitism were made during that march. It would be interesting to know the European Union leadership's response to this.

Thank you for your attention.