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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,  
AT THE 1163rd MEETING OF THE  
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

9 November 2017

**On the glorification of Nazism in Latvia**

Mr. Chairperson,

We have already raised the question here on more than one occasion of the inadmissibility of the glorification of Nazism and the exaltation of Nazis and their accomplices as national heroes, but some OSCE participating States persist in whitewashing Nazism and excusing those guilty of the mass murder of civilians.

On 2 November, the second reading of the draft Law on the Status of Participants in the Second World War was approved by the Latvian Parliament. According to the law, only persons with Latvian citizenship on 17 June 1940 and permanent residents of Latvia who legally entered the country up to that date will be recognized as participants in the Second World War. This effectively precludes many soldiers fighting in the anti-Hitler coalition from obtaining this status. In other words, the law denies this status to veterans, many of whom are already over 90 years old, who in terms of what actually took place – and not the myths of Soviet occupation – made a real contribution to liberating Latvia and the countries of Europe from Nazism.

The preamble to the draft law states that its aim is to pay tribute to the citizens of Latvia who – mark this – participated in the Second World War. For the lawmakers the side for which they fought – Nazi Germany or the anti-Hitler coalition – is irrelevant. The Latvian authorities have evidently forgotten that in the years of the Nazi occupation of Latvia 89 per cent of the Jewish population was exterminated, with the direct involvement of members of the Latvian SS. Only a couple of hundred of the 80,000 Jews managed to survive the local Holocaust organized by the SS – not to mention the war crimes committed by the Latvian SS Legion in Poland, Belarus and various regions of Russia.

The real aim of the draft law is to form a legal basis for excusing the criminal acts of Nazis, including members of the Latvian SS, and according the same status to members of an organization condemned at the Nuremberg Trials as those who really fought Nazism.

We find attempts to rewrite history and question the outcome of the Second World War formalized in the Charter of the United Nations and the verdicts of the Nuremberg Trials to be absolutely unacceptable and morally reprehensible. This draft law is a clear confirmation of a process of doublespeak that is taking on increasingly bizarre forms. The sacrilegious character of this initiative is evident. It is particularly dangerous in the context of the new wave of xenophobia and nationalism in Europe.

We urge the Latvian authorities not to adopt this law and the OSCE, its Chairmanship and specialist institutions, including the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the High Commissioner on National Minorities, to give due attention to this plan, which insults the memory of the millions of victims of Nazism.

To provide a better understanding of the historical truth, we are distributing some information about the Latvian Legion of the SS.

Thank you for your attention.

### **Information: some historical facts about the Latvian Legion of the SS**

The Latvian Legion of the SS was created in 1943. It included 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 the “Winterzauber” action on the territory of modern-day Russian and Belarus against partisans, with the involvement of seven Latvian police battalions, whose members then became part of the SS Legion. Several hundred villages were destroyed in the action. No fewer than 12,000 civilians were shot and cremated, including over 2,000 children under the age of 12 years. Around 15,000 were sent to work in Germany and in Salaspils concentration camp.

It should be noted that the members of the punitive police battalions were not conscripted. The commander of the 1st Riga Police Regiment, Robert Osis, who was responsible for the formation of Latvian police units and then held positions in the SS Legion, admitted that they were paid mercenaries. This same Osis was officially recognized as a war criminal.

The Latvian Legion of the SS in 1944 and 1945 also included members of the notorious Arajs Kommando. This was a subunit of the auxiliary police consisting of Latvians. It was established in 1941 by Viktors Arājs and performed the Nazis’ dirtiest work. According to various data, between 26,000 and 60,000 Jews were killed by members of the Kommando.

It should be emphasized that 60 per cent of the instructors and 90 per cent of the officers in the Latvian Legion were volunteers. The first three recruitments to the Legion from spring 1943 to January 1944 were not forced. Those who did not wish to serve in the SS could choose to join the labour force or auxiliary units of the Wehrmacht, or simply avoid conscription at the risk of a mild punishment of six months’ imprisonment. It was only at the end of the war, given the large number of casualties at the front, that Latvians were enlisted in the Legion under threat of harsh punishment.

Latvian SS members also committed war crimes directly within the Legion. For example, on 18 December 1943 a gendarmerie company of the 19th Waffen Grenadier Division of the SS shot 250 civilians in the village of Zalya-Gora west of Novgorod. On 21 January in the village of Glukhaya, around 200 people were shut in a barn and machine-gunned by members of the company. Altogether from 18 December 1943 to 2 April 1944, the 19th Latvian Division of the SS took part in punitive actions in which 23 villages were destroyed and at least 1,300 people shot.

In February 1945 on Polish territory, soldiers and officers of the 15th Latvian Division of the Waffen-SS burned alive more than 30 Polish soldiers from the 1st Tadeusz Kościuszko Infantry Division captured by it.

In view of all this, no one could consider members of the voluntary Latvian Legion of the SS to be “victims of circumstances”, as the Latvian authorities are attempting to maintain. The judgement of the Nuremberg Trials applies directly to them.