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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
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1320th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

17 June 2021

On human rights violations in the European Union

Madam Chairperson,

We are seriously concerned both about the ongoing human rights violations in various European Union Member States and about the overall policy by the authorities in Brussels in this area. This is evidenced, above all, by the publications of the European Union's specialist human rights bodies.

The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights report on the state of affairs in 2020 [Fundamental Rights Report – 2021] was released last week. In particular, it notes that: “The COVID-19 pandemic brought to the surface existing racism [and] xenophobia ... and exacerbated them. The health crisis was ... used as a pretext to attack minorities – including migrants, people with immigrant backgrounds and Roma.”

For example, surveys of migrants in the Netherlands and Denmark have found that a large number of them feel discriminated against in various areas of life compared with people without immigrant backgrounds. Similar trends can be observed in France and Belgium. According to data from 2020, discrimination in education in Austria increased by 36 per cent in 2018–2019, most cases being based on ethnicity and religious affiliation. In addition, against the background of the coronavirus pandemic, an increase in intolerance and related incidents against persons of Asian origin was recorded in the Netherlands, Spain and Germany. In Belgium, people with Moroccan roots had problems finding rented accommodation during the first lockdown.

There is also the problem of police profiling in EU Member States. According to the May statistical survey of police checks published by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, members of ethnic minorities and immigrants were searched by the police much more frequently (34 per cent) than the general population (14 per cent). In some countries, up to 80 per cent of ethnic minorities viewed their being stopped by law enforcement officers as racial profiling. In the Netherlands and Romania, for example, only 3 per cent and 10 per cent of Roma, respectively, rated police behaviour as respectful.

Against this background, following the killing of George Floyd in the United States of America in 2020, cases of police violence against minorities in Europe are also being uncovered.

It was not long ago that such an incident was reported in France. In 2019, police officers nearly strangled an unarmed and innocent African, Boubacar Dramé. He called the police at the request of a woman who had lost her daughter in the street. The young man was a member of a local youth organization. Despite all the wrongdoing, two years later the local prosecutor dismissed Dramé's complaint against the law enforcement officers. He said that there was no "blatant" use of brutality. And this is just one of the many in a succession of cases of police violence in France. In that connection, it is worth remembering the not-so-distant "gilets jaunes" mass protests that swept Paris and other cities in that country.

In Germany as well, law enforcement officers beat up a disabled Turkish man in the middle of the street in Frankfurt in May. In total, about 12,000 cases of unlawful use of force by the police were counted in Germany in 2019. The results of a study conducted by the Ruhr University, which were published by the television channel ARD, as well as the magazines *Kontraste* and *Der Spiegel*, attest to this. Its author is the well-known criminologist Tobias Singelstein. More than 1,000 people took part in the online survey in German, English, Arabic and French. We believe that 2020 and 2021 will be no different.

The German armed forces are also no strangers to intolerance. According to *Der Spiegel*, German soldiers from the NATO mission in Lithuania sexually assaulted a fellow soldier with Afghan roots in April and threw a party during which they sang anti-Semitic and radical right-wing songs. We should like to remind our distinguished colleagues from Germany that neo-Nazism, anti-Semitism and racism are of the same order. And their danger was demonstrated by the events of the Second World War.

The violent crackdown on peaceful assemblies in EU countries also continues. We have commented on such stories many times before, but they recur again and again. On 12 June in Paris, law enforcement officers used tear gas to disperse an unauthorized party of opponents of the coronavirus restrictions. On 15 May, police in the French capital used rubber bullets, water cannons and tear gas against demonstrators who had taken to the streets in support of Palestine. The police in Greece did the same to pro-Palestinian demonstrators on the same day. Such an approach to peaceful assemblies can hardly be called humane and justified.

Among the sore points is the widespread violation of refugees' rights. This is recognized by authoritative human rights bodies. On 26 May, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights sharply criticized the migration policy of the EU authorities in Brussels. The statement said the European Union knowingly condones violations of the rights of refugees seeking to reach Europe via the central Mediterranean. The lack of human rights protection for migrants at sea "is not a tragic anomaly, but rather a consequence of concrete policy decisions and practices by the ... EU Member States and institutions". High Commissioner Michelle Bachelet herself has called on the European Union to "urgently reform their current search and rescue policies and practices in the central Mediterranean that too often rob migrants of their lives, dignity and human rights". We advise our European colleagues to listen to the United Nations.

In the context of the pandemic, corruption in the European Union has become much worse. According to a survey conducted by human rights organizations, the health sector is a major hotbed of corrupt practices. It reported that 29 per cent of EU residents had to use personal connections to obtain health care, with 46 per cent of people doing so in Portugal and 54 per cent in the Czech Republic. Overall, the highest levels of corruption in the health sector are in Romania (22 per cent) and Bulgaria (19 per cent). However, respondents also indicated that their Governments are not dealing with the pandemic in a transparent way – in France, Poland and Spain this was the view of more than 60 per cent of those surveyed.

Of course, these are just the tip of the iceberg of the multidimensional problems that remain and are getting worse in a number of EU countries. They concern the persecution of undesirable media and their

categorization as “right” and “wrong”, the clamping down on the linguistic and educational rights of national minorities and the like.

We therefore call on the European Union as a whole and its Member States to take immediate action to address the human rights situation in line with their international commitments, including within the OSCE framework. The specialist structures in our Organization, including the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Representative on Freedom of the Media, should provide them with the necessary assistance.

Thank you for your attention.