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PC.DEL/1252/19
8 November 2019

ENGLISH
Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1246th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

7 November 2019

On political persecution in Lithuania

Mr. Chairperson,

Politically motivated persecution of those who speak out in a manner different from the authorities is continuing in Lithuania. Freedom of speech and basic human rights are victims of the centralized attitude of demonizing the Soviet period.

The case of Algirdas Paleckis, an opposition politician, journalist and former leader of the Lithuanian Socialist People's Front, is indicative of this approach. He was fined in 2011 for uttering a single sentence about the events in 1991 near the Vilnius television tower, "they were shooting at their own people". The investigators initially demanded a year's imprisonment. Even then, the criminal prosecution of Mr. Paleckis revealed to the whole world the real situation with freedom of speech in "democratic" Lithuania.

A few years later, this undesired oppositionist was once again out of favour with the Lithuanian Government. Today he is accused of allegedly "spying for Russia". And yet, there is nothing to show following the detention of the journalist and politician without reason for a whole year. In spite of this, on 22 October, Kaunas District Court granted the prosecutor's request to detain Mr. Paleckis for a further two months. The prosecution's political motivation is evident, and this is also understood, by the way, in Lithuania itself. For example, the former mayor of Kaunas, Vytautas Šustauskas, stated that only a "weak State could detain an innocent man". We should also like to see a reaction to this persecution of a reporter from the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Mr. Harlem Désir.

The Paleckis case is unfortunately not an isolated one. Last year, criminal proceedings were initiated against Vyacheslav Titov, a member of Klaipeda city council and head of the local branch of the Union of Russians of Lithuania, the latest example of how dissent is combated in the country. The case was brought merely because he had publicly expressed doubts about the need to glorify the leader of the Forest Brothers, Adolfas Ramanauskas-Vanagas, and recalled his involvement in the massacre of civilians during the Second World War. For the expression of an opinion, which, by the way, was based on a verdict of the Supreme Court of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic of 1957, Mr. Titov was fined 10,000 euros. Moreover, only the day before yesterday, 5 November, the Central Election Commission of Lithuania also once again completely revoked the politician's council mandate.

The human rights defender Giedrius Grabauskas, chairperson of the Lithuanian Socialist People's Front, is also being persecuted in Lithuania for political reasons. According to the charge sheet handed to him by the law enforcement officers, the reason for the searches of his home in October this year and the seizure of computers was an interview given to Russian television in which he simply condemned the Forest Brothers.

We should also like to draw attention to the blatantly politicized prosecution of Yuri Mel, one of the defendants in the "13 January 1991 incident". We already discussed this case in detail in May. As you know, when they pronounced their verdicts in March, the Lithuanian judges, following on from the country's legislators, grossly violated the basis of international law, including the principle of disallowing the retroactive application of criminal law. The objective circumstances of the case were also ignored.

Yuri Mel was sentenced to seven years' deprivation of liberty merely for having fired three blank rounds in the air from his tank in January 1991 on the orders of his commander. No attention was even paid to the fact that Mr. Mel has a serious medical condition (diabetes mellitus), and this circumstance was not taken into account by the prison authorities. Thus, while he was being held in pre-trial detention in Šiaulėnai in April and May, he was immediately subjected to harsh treatment: frequent transfer from one cell to another, denial of medical assistance, temporary ban on purchasing medicines and other products from the prison store, and so on. The wrongful conviction of Mr. Mel by the Lithuanian court is also in clear violation of the right to a fair, unbiased and independent trial and also to dignified treatment within the penitentiary system.

All of the cases mentioned here are nothing but political repression and the suppression of dissent in the realities of the twenty-first century. It is also surprising that Lithuania's partners in the European Union systematically close their eyes to it. We demand that the Lithuanian authorities put an immediate stop to this persecution. We also urge the OSCE's specialist bodies and participating States to react to Lithuania's blatantly illegal steps.

Thank you for your attention.