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PC.DEL/578/21
22 April 2021

ENGLISH
Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE
1310th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL
VIA VIDEO TELECONFERENCE**

22 April 2021

Violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Estonia

Mr. Chairperson,

The human rights situation in Estonia is deteriorating. The authorities are continuing to purge the country's public and political space of divergent opinions. To that end, a spy scare and anti-Russian hysteria are being whipped up.

On 30 March, it became known that the human rights defender Sergey Seredenko had been arrested. He is being charged with anti-State activities under Article 235 of the Estonian Penal Code, which deals with the "establishment or maintenance of a relationship ... with a foreign State, an organization of a foreign State or a person acting at the request of a foreign State with the aim of committing a criminal offence [against Estonia]". Mr. Seredenko faces a prison sentence of up to six years.

The criminal prosecution of Mr. Seredenko is politically motivated and directly tied to his professional activities. For a long time he performed, on a voluntary basis, the duties of a "Russian ombudsman" in Estonia, commenting publicly on various violations of the rights of the Russian-speaking minority in that Baltic country. He spoke out as a citizen of his country who cares about its fate and what the future has in store for the national minorities living there. He did so at various international forums and venues, including the OSCE review meeting in Warsaw. And for this active stance of his he may now well be handed a real prison sentence. This is a violation of OSCE commitments on freedom of expression – in particular of paragraph 9 of the CSCE Copenhagen Document (1990), in which "[t]he participating States reaffirm that everyone will have the right to freedom of expression. This right will include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers." Mr. Seredenko has been denied that right altogether. And this is taking place against a backdrop of complete permissiveness towards former "warriors" from the Waffen-SS legion and their acolytes, who are openly promoting Nazi ideology through their annual gatherings and marches.

It is to be hoped that the total groundlessness of the charges brought against him will be proved in the course of the investigation. As is known, a few days ago an open letter was addressed to the President of Estonia, Kersti Kaljulaid, by representatives of the Russian community in the Baltic and members of the European Parliament, the Estonian Parliament and the Riga City Council. In this letter the request is made to

change the pretrial restraining order against Mr. Seredenko to one that does not involve detention in custody. We would remind our Estonian colleagues of the provisions of the Charter of Paris for a New Europe, which lays down that “no one will be subject to arbitrary arrest or detention.”

The case of Mr. Seredenko is not the only instance of a clampdown on public figures, human rights defenders and journalists who stand up for the rights of the Russian-speaking community in Estonia. There were at least two similar incidents in 2019: the fine imposed on Andrey Krasnoglazov, Director of the Pushkin Institute in Tallinn (a non-profit organization), and the prosecution of Mstislav Rusakov, the head of the non-profit human rights organizations Kitez and Russian School of Estonia.

Unfortunately, no condemnation of these outrageous instances of persecution of dissenters has been forthcoming from the Estonian Government’s Western colleagues, who, by the way, have publicly interceded on more than one occasion for participants in events of our Organization subjected to harassment by the authorities in their home countries. It is again a case of double standards.

In addition to the use of punitive justice to persecute “undesirable” public figures, another cause for concern is the grave encroachment upon the linguistic and educational rights of the Russian-speaking population in Estonia. The Russian language is systematically being squeezed out of the Estonian educational process, while Russian-speaking citizens are being deprived of the right to be taught in their native language. This runs directly counter to the Estonian Government’s basic commitments on the protection of national minorities.

Russian-language media outlets are being subjected to pressure. On 1 January 2020, the Estonian office of the Sputnik news agency was forced, under spurious pretexts, to suspend its operations. On 20 March 2020, the current affairs show *Novosti Estonii* (News of Estonia) ceased to be broadcast. The Estonian Government is in this way flagrantly trampling underfoot freedom of speech and the media.

Additionally, the shameful phenomenon of statelessness continues to exist in Estonia. The country has repeatedly been criticized for this by leading human rights organizations, including the United Nations and the OSCE, yet no significant positive changes are to be seen.

We have also taken note of the recent concluding observations on Estonia by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. These point out stigmatization and discrimination against people with disabilities in that country, the lack of a social infrastructure that is tailored to their needs, the low level of implementation of the Convention’s provisions, and other similar issues. The situation calls for serious attention by the international community.

We once again demand that the Estonian authorities stop flouting civil and political rights, freedom of the media, the rights of persons with disabilities and commitments on the protection of national minorities. As for the Estonian Government’s European Union partners and the relevant OSCE structures, we call on them to stop ignoring the blatant violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Estonia.

Thank you for your attention.