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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1172nd MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

18 January 2018

**On the adoption of the law in Latvia on the status of
participants in the Second World War**

Mr. Chairperson,

We should like to comment on the Law on the Status of Participants in the Second World War, adopted by the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia and signed by the President of Latvia on 4 January 2018. This Law, which enters into force on 1 February 2018, was hastily approved by the President despite a call by Jānis Urbanovičs, the chairman of the Harmony parliamentary faction, to send the draft law back to the Saeima for revision.

We believe that this step reflects a deliberate policy of rewriting history and is an insult to the memory of the 150,000 Soviet soldiers who heroically sacrificed their lives to liberate Latvia.

By adopting this blasphemous piece of legislation, Latvia's political leaders are effectively recognizing an equal status for Nazis and their accomplices and for the soldiers who fought in the anti-Hitler coalition. This Law will yet further divide society and will play into the hands of those who seek to incite xenophobia and inter-ethnic strife in Latvia. This is a clear attempt to cast doubt on the results of the Second World War as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and the decisions of the Nuremberg Tribunal.

The Latvian side has assured us that this Law will not apply to those who have been convicted of crimes against humanity, war crimes, genocide or other serious crimes committed during the Second World War. But these provisions in no way mean that this Law will not apply to legionnaires from SS units, for example. Indeed, some of these legionnaires have returned to Latvia from Western countries in a bid to flee justice there. We have already given information at Permanent Council meetings on numerous cases, backed by historical facts, of atrocities committed by the Latvian Legion, including atrocities targeting civilians and extermination of Jews. We are ready to remind you of these brutal crimes once again.

We think it in the interests of truth and justice that the OSCE participating States resolutely protest against this case of legal arbitrariness in modern Europe, where genuinely

democratic States firmly condemn Second World War collaborators. We would like to hear the voice of the European Union authorities, who are effectively indulging this whitewashing of Nazism.

Furthermore, as Jānis Urbanovičs, the leader of one of Latvia's biggest political forces, stressed, "recognition as participants in the Second World War cannot be accorded to Latvia's non-citizens. This is an outrageous weakening of the status of non-citizens as individuals belonging to Latvia, and the Law deprives the majority of Red Army veterans of the possibility of obtaining the status of participant in the Second World War."

We call on the Italian Chairmanship, the heads of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the Secretary General, the Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the High Commissioner on National Minorities to act within their mandates to give a principled assessment of this outrageous step on the part of the Latvian authorities.

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 Russia 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 burned, 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.