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**STATEMENT BY MR. ANDREY KELIN,  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,  
AT THE MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

22 March 2012

**Regarding the parade of former SS members in Riga**

Mr. Chairperson,

We should like to draw the attention of all the delegations of OSCE participating States to the procession of the veterans of the Latvian *Waffen SS* volunteer legion that took place in Riga on 16 March.

We deeply regret that not only the did Latvian authorities not ban the parade of former SS members, but actually gave it the green light, and then even added to its political significance in that deputies from the ruling coalition in the Saeima (Parliament) took part in the procession, which had not happened in previous years. It is of grave concern that members of ultranationalist youth movements marched alongside the former SS members. Immediately prior to the parade, the Latvian authorities ran a massive propaganda campaign vindicating the legionnaires. In particular, the country's leaders declared that people should bow before them. This approach represents a gross distortion of history, especially remembering the crimes committed by the Latvian SS in Russia, Belarus and Poland and their involvement in the extermination of hundreds of thousands of the peaceful inhabitants of those countries. This is in fact a case of redefining the fundamental common European values that underpin the current world order.

The Latvian authorities are indeed using whatever means they can to hush up the historical truth and cover up the crimes of the Nazis and their hangers-on. They did not permit an exhibition to be held in Riga on the fate of children taken away to Latvia from Belarus and Russia in 1943–1944. The exhibition had been put together by the Russian “Historical Memory” foundation with the support of the Belarusian peace foundation and the German foundation “Memory, Responsibility and the Future”. It aimed to draw attention to the victims of the punitive operations perpetrated by the Nazis and their accomplices in regions of Belarus and Russia bordering Latvia. During those operations, thousands of minors were taken away to Latvia and perished in the Salaspils concentration camp. Two Russian historians — Alexander Dyukov and Vladimir Simindey — who have worked extensively on collecting documentary evidence of the crimes committed, are officially banned from entering Latvian territory. In addition to that, their names are on the “persona non grata” list for the Schengen area.

It is also a cause for concern that these attempts to vindicate Nazi ideology and crimes are taking place against a background of ongoing violations of the human rights of national minorities in Latvia. A referendum held on 18 February on the status of the Russian language confirms the serious problems in this area. Instead of taking the reasons for and results of the referendum seriously, the Latvian authorities appear to have chosen the route of harsher threats against undesirable people.

The recent announcement by the Latvian justice minister, Gaidis Berzins, that the removal of Latvian citizenship could in time become a political decision bears witness to this policy. It is telling that this announcement coincided with media reports that the organizers of the February referendum would be prosecuted. Clearly the idea is to “punish” the disloyal citizens who had the audacity to carry out this initiative. Apparently something like a witch hunt is going on.

It is also regrettable that the authorities in Riga are disregarding the recommendations in the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance report on Latvia, published on 21 February 2012. It contains a clear call on the Latvian authorities to condemn all attempts to commemorate those who fought in *Waffen SS* divisions and collaborated with the Nazis. The Commission’s recommendation that: “Any gathering or march legitimizing in any way Nazism should be banned” is also unequivocal.

The parade of the *Waffen SS* legion veterans has provoked justifiable indignation and anti-fascist protest in Latvia and elsewhere. Unfortunately, both the parade of former SS members on 16 March in Riga and the referendum, as well as the unacceptable statements by Latvian politicians, continue to go unnoticed by the European Union and European Parliament, usually so scrupulous in monitoring human rights violations in other countries, mainly to the east of Vienna.

This cavalier attitude to the glorification of the Nazis leaves their successors with a sense of impunity. This, in turn, encourages the growth of neo-Nazism and xenophobia in a whole range of European countries. We believe that the time is more than ripe to carry out a proper evaluation of the actions of the Latvian authorities in vindicating the SS members convicted by the Nuremberg Tribunal. This also needs to be done within the OSCE, an organization mandated to take all the necessary measures to prevent a repetition of the tragedy of the Second World War.

Thank you for your attention.