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**STATEMENT BY
MR. ALEKSANDR VOLGAREV, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1459th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

1 February 2024

**On the ongoing grave violations by the Baltic States of the rights of the Russian and
Russian-speaking population**

Madam Chairperson,

Discrimination against the Russian and Russian-speaking population by representatives of certain Western alliance countries persists in the OSCE area. One of the most striking manifestations of Russophobia occurs in those participating States that have also been known previously for their segregational approaches to members of ethnic groups and national minorities, including Russians. Not only is harassment not suppressed by their leadership; on the contrary it is justified, approved of and even encouraged.

An unhealthy situation persists in Latvia, where any suggestion of rationality, humanity and common sense is completely absent. The Latvian authorities have started to put the discriminatory Immigration Act into practice. On 12 January this year, Boris Katkov, a Russian military pensioner and chairman of the board of the Latvia-Russia Co-operation Association, was expelled from the country with an indefinite ban on his return. According to the authorities, the 82-year-old poses a “threat to national security”. No specific examples of his “guilt” are given. By the way, our compatriot still has family in the country – a wife, children and grandchildren.

The Latvian authorities are in flagrant violation of the principle of non-separation of the family and other provisions of the 1994 bilateral Russian-Latvian intergovernmental agreement on social guarantees for Russian military pensioners and members of their families.

This is not the first time that unwanted elderly persons have been deported. In October 2020, even before the start of the Russian special military operation in Ukraine, another member of the Russian diaspora was expelled from the country under similar circumstances. The case concerned Vladimir Norvind, a military pensioner and chairman of the Republican Veterans’ Association in Latvia. He was also separated from his family and deported despite serious health problems, and his residence permit was cancelled.

In total, as from 16 January this year, 985 Russian citizens are scheduled for deportation. More than half are over 60 years old. They have already been deprived of the minimum social welfare package and

access to free healthcare within the country. Moreover, this figure is not final; it could double by April this year, after the deadline for applications for postponement of the State language examination has passed.

The Latvian authorities' segregation of people on the basis of nationality must finally become the object of attention of our Organization and its relevant executive structures. We once again call upon the Chairmanship, now with Malta, to appoint an OSCE representative to the Latvian-Russian Joint Commission on Military Pensioners.

The work of this body is more relevant than ever when elderly people with serious health problems are separated from their families and are unable to pursue their lives. Latvia's representatives in the OSCE should be ashamed that the only thing the political elites of the country they represent have been able to think of is settling scores with elderly, defenceless pensioners and helpless invalids. This is base and completely untenable.

Madam Chairperson,

Latvia's vile practices of using visa leverage or manipulating citizenship to expel undesirable citizens have been adopted by Lithuania and Estonia. The ease with which this happened is due not only to entrenched Russophobia, but also to the absence of any reaction from international human rights bodies, including the OSCE.

A new version of the Citizenship Act has been in force in Lithuania since June 2023. Under the amended Act, citizenship obtained under exceptional circumstances and in cases of dual citizenship may be revoked. The reason is the infamous "threat to national security" and "support for Russian aggression". We would remind you that the President of the Republic has already revoked the citizenship of Russian figure skater Margarita Drobiazko, and a similar process has been launched with regard to the ballerina Ilzè Liepa. Moreover, since November 2023 the Department of State Security has carried out checks on 800 persons who received Lithuanian passports under exceptional circumstances. So in other words, several hundred people are at risk.

In mid-January this year, the Estonian authorities refused to renew Metropolitan Eugene's temporary residence permit. He had been subjected to considerable harassment in the past. Numerous familiar anti-Russian "labels" were pinned on him, but no concrete evidence of his allegedly hostile activities was given.

Madam Chairperson,

We are deeply concerned about the intentions of the Estonian authorities to "temporarily" deprive Russian and Belarusian citizens of the right to vote in local government elections. These discriminatory moves took place back in the autumn of 2023, when the ruling party tried to firm up this repressive practice through the adoption of the relevant legislation. However, the initiative was rejected as being unconstitutional. The local elites will now push for nothing less than a constitutional amendment. This fundamental approach would, of course, remove the provisional nature of the measure and testifies to the long-term character of this segregational scheme. Through their actions, the Estonian authorities are in flagrant violation of a number of OSCE commitments in the areas of rule of law, the promotion of democracy, non-discrimination and respect for the rights of national minorities.

Madam Chairperson,

We have focused today on the most egregious manifestations of discrimination against the Russian and Russian-speaking population in the OSCE area of responsibility. However, this does not mean that other States are free from anti-Russian manifestations, often fuelled by representatives of local authorities. Details are provided in the recent report by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs entitled “On violations of the rights of Russian citizens and compatriots in foreign countries”. We urge everyone to read it carefully and call upon the Director of the Office for Democratic institutions and Human Rights, Mr. Matteo Mecacci, and the High Commissioner on National Minorities, Mr. Kairat Abdrakhmanov, to give a principled assessment of the cases cited there.

In conclusion, we should like to stress that the protection of the rights of the Russian and Russian-speaking population and of compatriots living abroad will continue to be a priority for Russia, including in the OSCE. The actions of States acting unchecked and with impunity require a substantive response from our Organization. The OSCE functionaries should finally start to act and quell the nationalist Russophobic frenzy of the Baltic elites. We believe that the practical results of these actions would constitute a fitting conclusion to their tenure in office in September of this year.

Thank you for your attention.