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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1164th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

16 November 2017

**In response to the report by the OSCE High Commissioner on
National Minorities, Mr. Lamberto Zannier**

Mr. Chairperson,
High Commissioner,

Thank you for your detailed report. We note the pragmatic approach that you strive to adhere to in solving the problems of national minorities. We also read with interest the Graz Recommendations on Access to Justice and National Minorities that you presented two days ago. Our experts are studying them now.

On the whole, we share your concern regarding the situation of national minorities in the OSCE area. In a number of participating States, we are observing a systematic attack on the rights of this group of persons, including education and the use of their mother tongue. Under the pretext of combating external and internal threats, the authorities are taking steps that lead to a narrowing of the information space for national minorities. All this, as we have already emphasized on numerous occasions, contributes to increased tension in society. The artificial division of “us” and “them” along ethnic lines creates a basis for conflicts, which can escalate into a “hot phase”.

We agree with the High Commissioner that “conflicts involving national minorities are not inevitable. They are rooted in political choices.”

The situation unfolding in Ukraine regarding national minorities is especially worrying. The executive and legislative authorities of that country have adopted a policy of removing the Russian language from all spheres of activity – educational, administrative, media-related, social and political. And this in a State where Russian is the mother tongue for millions of people. The political short-sightedness of such a step is obvious to many people, just not to the authorities in Kyiv.

The Law on Education recently adopted by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine is further graphic evidence of this. Aimed essentially at the complete Ukrainianization of the educational environment, this law creates a direct threat of the complete assimilation not only

of ethnic Russians, but also Bulgarians, Hungarians, Poles, Romanians, Greeks and other ethnic groups who are native speakers of regional or minority languages. The Ukrainian Government claims that it wants to integrate national minorities into Ukrainian society, as if they were aliens from who knows where. In practice, however, it is an attempt to deprive them of the very “form of identification” about which you have spoken today, without which no ethnic group or people are viable.

Altogether, the situation regarding national minorities and the Russian-speaking population in Ukraine has reached the point where preventive measures alone are no longer sufficient. Urgent steps are needed to prevent further escalation of the situation. We expect concrete proposals and an action plan from the High Commissioner on this problem. We should like to hope that after your upcoming visit to Ukraine its authorities will finally stop flagrantly violating OSCE human rights commitments.

Serious problems persist regarding the situation of national minorities in the Baltic States. We have already mentioned here the legislative innovations of the Latvian authorities, which violate the right to receive an education in one’s mother tongue and call for checks on the “loyalty” of directors and teachers at educational institutions where national minorities are taught. A similar situation is also observed in Lithuania, whose authorities are pursuing a policy of closing down schools providing instruction in the Russian language. The vocational training of teachers in minority languages is being cut back in the country, and a ban remains on the use of minority languages in public and private institutions and in communication with them. This creates a discriminatory situation as regards the access of national minorities to State services, especially health care.

In the context of the Baltic countries, we should like once again to draw the attention of the High Commissioner and the participating States to the issue of statelessness. This shameful phenomenon for Europe in the twenty-first century continues to blight the lives of hundreds of thousands of inhabitants of Latvia and Estonia. Unfortunately, these two country-specific cases, just like statelessness in general, were not touched upon in Mr. Zannier’s address today. Nor were they reflected in the Handbook on Statelessness in the OSCE Area, prepared this spring by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the Office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities in conjunction with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. We hope that this is not an attempt to consign such an acute problem to oblivion. Evidently, it would be worth following the example of the Council of Europe, where this question is considered to be a priority.

In conclusion, we should like to wish the High Commissioner and his qualified team of experts every success. We believe that you will be able to do a lot of useful things within the framework of your mandate. For our part, we are always ready to provide you with the necessary assistance.

Thank you for your attention.