

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
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AT THE 1182nd MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

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On discrimination in sport and violation of basic OSCE principles

Mr. Chairperson,

We should like to raise an issue which, we are aware, is not to the liking of some at the OSCE, who say that this is not the appropriate forum for its discussion. We are referring to discrimination in sport, particularly in high-level sport.

It is high time that we address this issue. Many will recall the discussions in 2016 on the Russian-Belarusian draft ministerial decision on discrimination in sport. Unfortunately, due to the non-constructive line taken by a number of participating States, it was not possible to reach a consensus at the Ministerial Council meeting in Hamburg. But the problem remains and has only worsened with time.

For some time now we have seen how a number of States are increasingly politicizing sport. This has resulted in violations of the rights of people from States deemed “undesirable” by the West. Recent examples concerning our country include the refusal by the embassy of the United States of America in Moscow to hold visa interviews with members of the Russian national freestyle wrestling team. They gave the unconvincing argument that this was due to the shortage of consular staff. This refusal meant that the Russian athletes were unable to compete in the Freestyle World Cup in Iowa City.

Another example is the position taken by some States, which, using spurious pretexts of a political nature, attempt to disrupt the holding of major international sporting competitions. They attempt to challenge, for example, Russia’s right to host the 2018 Football World Cup or the Universiade in 2019 in Krasnoyarsk.

These States’ governments go so far as to deprive their own athletes of the chance to shine at international competitions. One recent example was the boycott by the United States, the Czech Republic and Canada of the Biathlon World Cup stage held in Tyumen (Russian Federation) in March.

Those who take these decisions to ban sportspeople are imposing discrimination in sport along national lines and are using the practice of collective punishment. They are letting down thousands of athletes and millions of sports fans around the world. They are eroding people's belief that ever since the days of ancient Greece, sport has helped to bring people together, not divide them.

The sanctions against Paralympic athletes are particularly cynical. These people with disabilities are thus deprived of the dream for which they lived and trained so hard, overcoming their disabilities.

What we are talking about here is violation of our Organization's basic principles and commitments in the human dimension, including with regard to sport, freedom of movement, and prohibiting discrimination.

The 1975 Helsinki Final Act, for example, states that: "In order to expand existing links and co-operation in the field of sport, the participating States will encourage contacts and exchanges of this kind, including sports meetings and competitions of all sorts, on the basis of the established international rules, regulations and practice." Decisions from the CSCE meetings in Madrid in 1983 and Vienna in 1989 contain similar provisions. The Concluding Document of the Vienna Meeting states that: "The participating States will respect fully the right of everyone to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State."

As for the principle of non-discrimination, references to it abound in practically the entire spectrum of commitments adopted over the years of the OSCE's existence.

We therefore believe that it is high time for our Organization to reaffirm its commitment to depoliticizing sport, the Olympic movement's ideals, and an equal and unbiased application of high international sporting standards (including categorical rejection of doping), and make commitments to ensuring all possibilities for persons with disabilities to participate in sports events. We call on our colleagues to reflect on our proposal and on the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human rights and other relevant OSCE structures to share their thoughts on this issue.

Thank you for your attention.