

PC.DEL/713/18

8 June 2018

ENGLISH

Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1188th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

7 June 2018

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

Mr. Chairperson,
High Commissioner,

Thank you for your informative report. Your analysis confirms that the situation with regard to ensuring the rights of national minorities in the OSCE area continues to give serious cause for concern.

You indicate the importance of striking a balance between strengthening the State language and respecting the languages of national minorities. We agree that this is a rather sensitive issue. However, a solution can be found to everything if you are guided by one key message – the State language can lead to greater opportunities, but it should not jeopardize human rights and freedoms. This is exactly what is happening in a number of OSCE participating States.

For example, in Ukraine the situation of national and ethnic groups remains extremely complicated. The Government of Ukraine is completely unwilling to find solutions to their problems. On the contrary, the authorities create new ones. We observe pandering to incidences of xenophobia, aggressive nationalism and neo-Nazism. Moreover, the Ukrainian authorities have made the discrimination of national communities a State strategy. And it affects, first and foremost, the Russian-speaking population. For several years, there has been a crackdown on its cultural and historical heritage, the history of the country is being rewritten and the information space cleared.

The recent comments in Strasbourg by the Council of Europe's Advisory Committee regarding Ukraine's implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities unequivocally showed that many of the Ukrainian authorities' promises to improve the situation of minorities largely remained on paper. The conclusions of the Advisory Committee also clearly show that the Russian language is deliberately being discriminated against. Rather than being revised, changes to the radio and television broadcasting network, which provided for high quotas for the Ukrainian language and the

languages of the EU countries, have become even more stringent. In this regard, we welcome the fact that you raised these issues during your visits to Ukraine.

The most high-profile incident in recent years was the adoption by the Verkhovna Rada in September 2017 of the Law on Education. We have repeatedly pointed out that its application in its present form leads to undisguised discrimination against millions of Russian-speaking citizens in Ukraine. And this is against the backdrop of the Ukrainian Government's attempts to remove from the scope of the document the languages of the EU countries. In fact, the Ukrainian authorities subject the Russian language, the language of the absolute majority of their country, to double discrimination: it is disadvantaged both in relation to the State language and in relation to the languages of the EU Member States.

It is well known that representatives of international organizations, parliamentary structures and human rights associations have criticized the law. We are disappointed that at the conference that took place on 31 May in Oslo on the 20th anniversary of the Oslo Recommendations regarding the Linguistic Rights of National Minorities, this sensitive issue did not receive the necessary attention.

As part of your report on Ukraine, you note that language issues should not be politicized. After all, it is the Government of Ukraine that uses language reform as an instrument of political manipulation both nationally and internationally.

The situation concerning national minorities in Ukraine has reached a level where preventative measures are no longer sufficient. Urgent steps are needed to prevent escalation. We expect you to make specific proposals on this issue.

The shameful phenomenon of mass statelessness in Latvia (around 228,000 people at the beginning of this year) and Estonia (over 79,000 in 2017) remains. The fact that the Governments of both countries subject a significant part of the population to segregation cannot be ignored. Facts concerning the discrimination of national minorities in the economic and labour spheres, and the restriction of Russian-language information and education in these States are hushed up.

In your report, it is noted that the situation in Latvia is changing, and continuous monitoring of how these changes will impact society is needed. It is quite clear that nothing positive should be expected. Suffice it to recall the harsh response, which you also mention, of law enforcement authorities to the protest by representatives of the Russian-speaking minority in connection with the Latvian Government's recent steps in the sphere of education.

We have repeatedly drawn attention to the Latvian authorities' legislative innovations, which violate a person's right to receive education in their native language. Inspections are conducted to test the "loyalty" of institution heads and teachers at institutions where national minorities are educated. In violation of Article 13 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, on 23 May, the country's Ministry of Education and Science launched an initiative to "improve" the activities of private universities and colleges. The Ministry invites them to switch to using Latvian as the language of instruction or one of the languages of the EU Member States. According to the proposed amendments to the law, after 1 January 2019, students will no longer be admitted to Russian-language programmes.

A similar situation is being observed in Lithuania, where the authorities are pursuing a policy of closing down schools where teaching is carried out in Russian. Unfortunately, nothing is said about this in your report. The country has curtailed the vocational training of teachers in minority languages and continues to prohibit the use of minority languages in public and private institutions and in communication with them. This deprives members of national minorities of equal access to public services, especially in the health sector.

We are very concerned about the decision of 4 June by the Constitutional Court of Moldova on the revision of the law, which assigns to the Russian language the status of a lingua franca in the country. Apparently, it disturbs some political forces in Moldova. It has been proposed, in particular, to stop the translation of adopted laws into Russian and to abolish the right of citizens to contact the authorities in Russian. Such an undertaking has already provoked protests from civil society.

We call on the High Commissioner to respond promptly and clearly to these challenges within the framework of his mandate and to offer the participating States effective ways of resolving problems affecting the interests of millions of people.

Thank you for your attention.