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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1219th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

7 March 2019

On continuing violations of linguistic and educational rights in Estonia

Mr. Chairperson,

The large-scale campaign to eliminate Russian-language education is continuing in Estonia. As you know, higher education in Russian has already been curtailed in that country. Preparations are now being made for the transition to a fully Estonian secondary education. That policy is being introduced under the guise of a “unified school”, where Russian and Estonian schoolchildren are expected to be jointly educated in Estonian. Claims are circulating in the Estonian media about the “utility, relevance and optimality” of a unified education system. At the local level, the active indoctrination of the management of Russian-language schools is under way. In the event that the directors of educational institutions show “disloyalty”, they are forced to resign, as happened, for example, at a secondary school in the almost completely Russian-speaking city of Kohtla-Järve.

At the same time, the Estonian leadership and politicians, to put it mildly, are misinforming the public that such changes are being made for the benefit or even at the request of Russian-speaking students and their parents. For example, the President of the Republic of Estonia Kersti Kaljulaid, speaking at a reception on the occasion of Estonia’s Independence Day on 24 February, publicly stated that the majority of local parties allegedly advocate “a unified Estonian-language school system”, which “would not divide people into two communities”. Ms. Kaljulaid has also expressed the opinion that the Russian-speaking community is supposedly ready for this. She admitted that “the planned path will be long, difficult and costly”, but such a step is necessary “to protect the independence, language and culture of Estonia”. And what about the interests of the Russian population, about which she has kept silent? In fact, she instead equated Russian-language schools with a threat to the Estonian language, culture and State independence. In other words, the Russian inhabitants of the country, who make up a quarter of the total population of the Baltic State, are branded a threat.

The Estonian “nobility’s” *de facto* patronage of radical nationalists, who have set out to completely eliminate Russian-language schools, which have existed in Estonia for more than 300 years, is plain to see.

The aforementioned statement by the President drew sharp criticism from local politicians and human rights defenders, who questioned whether there was a consensus on the transition of Russian schools to the Estonian language, and also pointed to the absence of opinion polls on that issue.

The formation of education policy is, of course, the prerogative of the State. However, the Estonian Government has international commitments, notably within the framework of the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the European Union, to protect national minorities and their languages. In particular, in accordance with paragraph 19 of the Vienna Concluding Document (1989), the participating States “will protect and create conditions for the promotion of the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of national minorities on their territory.”

We demand that Estonia end discrimination in the field of languages and education. We call on the relevant OSCE structures, including the High Commissioner on National Minorities, Ambassador Lamberto Zannier, and the participating States, including those within the European Union, to pay attention to this situation.

Thank you for your attention.