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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1220th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

14 March 2019

On the fifth anniversary of the reunification of Crimea with Russia

Mr. Chairperson,

The fifth anniversary of the reunification of Crimea with Russia will be marked on 18 March. In 2014, the people of Crimea made their choice after freely expressing their will in a referendum. That it was the right choice and in full compliance with international law is evident. We have already spoken about the background to this truly historic event at the Permanent Council meeting on 28 February. Let us now turn to the current situation on the peninsula, which is still troubling some of our colleagues.

The Republic of Crimea and the federal city of Sevastopol are today firmly integrated into the common socio-economic and legal space of the Russian Federation. These are dynamically developing regions of our country, which show significant growth in the main sectors of the economy, despite the blockade mounted by the Ukrainian Government cutting off the food, water and energy supply and the sanctions imposed by a number of States.

The federal and regional authorities are working systematically to improve the population's quality of life and build modern infrastructure. There are in this process also problems to be overcome that were inherited from the Ukrainian period, when the peninsula was in fact deprived of the support of the central authorities, the situation there deteriorated, and the infrastructure began to show signs of wear and tear and fell into disrepair.

Thus, the State programme for the socio-economic development of the Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol provides for the creation of conditions for the balanced and sustainable development of the economy and social sector of the Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol.

In particular, the promotion of business activity and the operation of a free economic zone in Crimea, the establishment of an accessible and comfortable tourism environment, and also the development of infrastructure and effective operation of the road network are envisaged as part of the programme. Considerable progress has already been made in this

area. The opening of the Crimean Bridge to car traffic in May 2018 was clear evidence of this.

There is growing interest in the region on the part of foreign investors. At the end of the fourth annual Yalta International Economic Forum (April 2018), 70 agreements worth around 162 billion roubles were signed by the 612 foreign participants gathered from 71 countries of the world, including 15 OSCE participating States.

Crimea represents a unique “blend” of cultures and traditions of different peoples. The federal and regional authorities are engaged in the realization of the cultural, linguistic, religious and other rights of national minorities enshrined in the Russian Constitution, including the Crimean Tatars and ethnic Ukrainians. The peninsula’s inhabitants can freely exercise all these rights.

The results of an opinion poll conducted in 2018 regarding the state of inter-ethnic and interfaith relations in the region also testify to stability in Crimea. The overwhelming majority of Crimeans – 90 per cent – considered these to be “friendly” relations.

With the active involvement of autonomous ethnic and cultural organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), a State programme for the ethnocultural development of the peoples of Russia entitled “Republic of Crimea – a territory of inter-ethnic harmony for 2018–2020” is being implemented in Crimea. Large-scale cultural and educational events are held with the aim of promoting national cultures, traditions and religions, historical and cultural heritage is being preserved, and a media network in native languages is being developed.

According to the State Committee for Inter-Ethnic Relations and Deported Citizens of the Republic of Crimea, a total of 80 local and 14 regional autonomous ethnic and cultural organizations are registered in Crimea, representing 19 ethnic groups. In March 2018, the Council of Crimean Tatars was established under the Head of the Republic of Crimea, and prominent Crimean Tatar figures have joined this body.

For the purpose of harmonizing intercultural dialogue, there is a House of Friendship of the Peoples operating in the Crimean capital Simferopol, the Crimean Tatar television channel Millet (Nation) and radio station Vatan Sedasi (Voice of the Motherland) are in operation, as is the Ismail Gasprinsky media centre. Days of National Cultures are held annually, including days for Bulgarians, Koreans, Crimeans, French, Moldovans, Karaites, Germans, Jews, Ukrainians and other ethnic groups. For example, on 9 March of this year as part of the Days of Ukrainian Culture, the 205th anniversary of the birthday of the great Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko was celebrated in Simferopol.

All told, over 300 ethnocultural events were held in 2018 across the Republic of Crimea as part of the effort to ensure inter-ethnic harmony.

At the same time, these festivities also have an international dimension. In December 2018, the Days of Crimean Tatar Culture were held in Ankara in Turkey. The event was attended by representatives of culture, science and NGOs from the Crimean peninsula (36 delegates in total).

The Russian, Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar languages have become the State languages of the Republic of Crimea since its reunification with Russia. There are real opportunities to study them at school and at institutions of higher education.

The number of Ukrainian citizens visiting the Russian peninsula increases every year. There were around 400,000 visitors in 2014 and 2015, around 700,000 in 2016, more than 800,000 in 2017, and in 2018 already close to 1 million visitors. Furthermore, the total number of tourists visiting Crimea in 2018 was 6.8 million. This is 28 per cent more than in 2017. These figures are only slightly lower than the tourist figures here in Vienna (7.5 million tourists to 1.9 million Vienna residents in 2018), and if we talk about growth rates, then they substantially exceed them.

All this is taking place against the backdrop of the Ukrainian Government's media campaign to intimidate its citizens with calls not to visit the peninsula, and also despite the fact that many Ukrainians, to enter Crimea, have to spend hours queuing at Ukrainian checkpoints on the Russian-Ukrainian border.

In conclusion, we note that much remains to be done for the development of Russian Crimea, and it will be done. I would like you, esteemed colleagues, to also see this for yourselves, to see what is happening in Crimea with your own eyes. In that connection, we once again invite representatives of the OSCE participating States, parliamentarians and NGOs to visit the Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol. We are ready to receive in Crimea missions from international organizations too, if they are sent in accordance with the procedures that apply for visiting Russian territory.

As it happens, a French delegation headed by the president of the Franco-Russian Dialogue association and former Minister of Transport of France, Thierry Mariani, is currently in Crimea. The delegation includes honorary members of the French Parliament, former and current deputies of the National Assembly and representatives of municipal authorities, including the mayors of Brienne-le-Château and Biguglia. They arrived in Crimea in time to celebrate the fifth anniversary of its reunification with Russia.

Here are some of the assessments that members of the delegation and Mr. Mariani personally gave in their interviews to the media. "We did not observe any development of events until 2014, for us Crimea was 'Sleeping Beauty', a territory which seemed to be frozen in an eternal sleep." "We see how various State institutions are changing, the condition of the roads is changing ... Crimea has surged forward thanks to the administration that Russia represents here." "We personally see a difference between our first visit (in 2015) and this one – everything has changed. I find these changes fantastic." Speaking on the subject of the fifth anniversary of Crimea's return to Russia, Thierry Mariani said that the decision taken by the Crimeans "came from the heart". "It is a bold and resourceful decision", he said.

Thank you for your attention.