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**STATEMENT BY MR. ANVAR AZIMOV,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

24 March 2011

Regarding the parade of *Waffen SS* legionnaires in Riga

Mr. Chairperson,

Once again we are compelled to draw the Permanent Council's attention to the procession of former Latvian legionnaires of the *Waffen SS* that took place last Wednesday, 16 March. This was made possible by the fact that on the eve of the parade the Riga Administrative Court lifted the ban imposed by the municipal authorities on events on the city's streets. Thus, the green light was given for the procession of SS legionnaires and their supporters to the freedom monument, which triggered a counter protest organized by the Union of Citizens and Non-Citizens in co-operation with the Latvian Anti-Fascist Committee. In addition, two events involving concerts were held in honour of the legionnaires, along with a commemorative ceremony at the memorial in the cemetery in Lesten, where former members of the SS are buried.

Unfortunately, the honouring of former members of the SS actually takes place in Riga with police protection and is turning into a rally for national radicals. It is a matter of particular concern that Latvian politicians and members of the Saeima (Parliament) belonging to nationalist parties took part in these events.

We think it appropriate to recall that the Nuremberg Tribunal declared the SS responsible for countless war crimes and crimes against humanity. These kinds of processions sanctioned by the authorities are evidence of the continuing policy of the Latvian leadership to glorify the Nazis and systematically revise the outcome of the Second World War in spite of protests on the part of the international community and the anti-fascist forces in Latvia itself.

While addressing the 16th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Russia, Mr. Sergey Lavrov, mentioned that attempts to misrepresent the origins of the Second World War and its substance and consequences "represent nothing less than a desecration of the memory of millions of peoples of all nations fallen in the fight against Nazism" and "create a breeding ground for new misanthropic ideologies".

Attempts to justify the sanctioning of these kinds of events as ensuring the right to freedom of expression or freedom of assembly are unconvincing. It is also absurd to say that the Latvian SS legionnaires, who fought on the side of Nazi Germany, were in fact fighting for independence. It is after all well known that they were renowned not for their heroic battles with the Red Army but for the mass shootings of innocent civilians and for vindictive actions in Belarus, Russia and other countries. The chapter in the history of the Baltic Jews written by the legionnaires was particularly bloody. As you know, a considerable section of the Jewish population of Latvia was exterminated during the war years.

Consequently, parades of former members of the SS and the glorification of Nazism and of its henchmen who annihilated millions of people under the banner of the racial superiority theory are nothing but racist propaganda. It is regrettable that ever more young people are being drawn into these fascist marches.

Gatherings of Nazi supporters are an overt challenge to the entire international community and are unacceptable in modern-day Europe. We hope that the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the European Union will not stay on the sidelines and will provide an objective assessment of the legionnaires' procession.

We believe that the time has come for a substantive discussion within our Organization of the unacceptability of pandering to various manifestations of neo-Nazism and neo-fascism under the pretext of freedom of expression, assembly and association and to exercise the relevant provisions of Madrid Ministerial Council Decision No. 10/07.

Thank you for your attention.