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**STATEMENT BY MR. ANDREY RUDENKO,
DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 943rd MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

7 March 2013

Regarding the State policy of Estonia on linguistic diversity

Mr. Chairperson,

Ensuring the rights of national minorities, beginning with the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, remains one of the most important priorities of the OSCE in the human dimension. The commitments of the OSCE participating States to create conditions for the promotion of the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of national minorities have been confirmed in any number of Ministerial Council decisions. There is no doubt that the successful resolution of the problems connected with the integration of national minorities is in many respects the key to ensuring stability and security in the OSCE area.

Unfortunately, discrimination against national minorities remains a serious destabilizing factor in certain OSCE countries.

In particular, the recent steps by the Estonian authorities aimed at suppressing the languages of national minorities, *inter alia* by switching to instruction in the State language in the education system are a cause for concern. Pursuant to the State programme for the development of the Estonian language for 2011–2017, the Estonian Parliament has begun to consider amendments to the existing legislation, which envisage a switch to instruction in the State language at secondary vocational education establishments. No attention is paid in this connection to the fact that Russian-speaking inhabitants make up the overwhelming majority of the service industry personnel and skilled workforce.

The envisaged State programme to switch to instruction in the State language at the main general education schools from September of this year is in the same vein. We cannot but be alarmed at the amendments to the law on private schools approved by the Estonian Government. If these amendments are implemented, private schools will be deprived of their right to teach in the mother tongue of national minorities. Furthermore, the municipal authorities will be unable to participate in setting up schools of this kind even in places with a large Russian-speaking minority.

Certainly, no one is contesting the legal right of a country to preserve and support its State language. However, such measures should not be at the expense of the languages of national minorities or violate their right to “adequate opportunities for instruction of their mother tongue or in their mother tongue”, as the provisions of the 1990 CSCE Copenhagen Document stipulate.

Moreover, the use of unjustifiably harsh measures to promote the State language is at direct odds with the recommendations of international bodies, in particular those of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination of 23 September 2010, and with the conclusion of the Advisory Committee of the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers of 13 June 2012. Thus, for example, following an inspection in January at a place with a large Russian-speaking population (Ida-Virumaa) 67 police officers were fined by the Estonian Language Inspectorate for insufficient knowledge of the State language.

We call on the relevant OSCE institutions, first and foremost the High Commissioner on National Minorities, whose 20th anniversary we are celebrating, to address these worrying trends. We hope that the Estonian authorities will heed the numerous recommendations by international organizations to ensure the right of national minorities to receive education in their mother tongue and its unhindered development and use in places with a large national minority.