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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,  
AT THE 1152nd MEETING OF THE  
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

6 July 2017

**On the “war” against memorials in Poland**

Mr. Chairperson,

We are once again obliged to draw the OSCE’s attention to the blasphemous attitude of the Polish authorities towards Poland’s memorial legacy.

On more than one occasion we have raised the question of the massive destruction in Poland of memorials to Red Army soldiers who fought alongside the Poles to free Poland from Nazism. There has also been talk in the Polish Sejm of legislative initiatives that would effectively eradicate the memory of over 600,000 Red Army soldiers who died for Poland’s freedom.

Unfortunately, the “war” against memorials and the memory of the Polish nation continues.

For example, in March 2016, the memorial in honour of Red Army soldiers was taken down in the city of Trzemeszno (Greater Poland Voivodeship); in April a similar memorial was destroyed in Ślawno (West Pomeranian Voivodeship); in September the memorial in honour of the Red Army was removed in Sanok (Subcarpathian Voivodeship); and in October the memorial to Red Army soldiers was destroyed in Goleniów (West Pomeranian Voivodeship). At the same time, a stone with a memorial plaque commemorating the deeds of the commander of the 155th Guards Artillery Regiment, Guard Sergeant Karim Sultanov, was also removed. The stone was erected at the place where he was killed in 1945 putting a machine gun out of action with his own body during the assault on Goleniów by Soviet forces. In November by decree of the city council of Stargard (West Pomeranian Voivodeship) work started on the dismantling of the victory memorial in honour of the contribution of the Red Army to the liberation of Poland.

I am obliged to mention one further tendency directly linked to the anti-Russian policy cultivated today by the country’s authorities, namely the multiple acts of vandalism concerning Soviet war memorials in Poland. There were 21 such cases in 2014 and 15 in 2015 and in the first nine months of 2016 there were already 19. The local authorities

condemn such acts, but there is no word about the identification and prosecution of the perpetrators.

Now it has become known that on 22 June 2017, after a third reading, the Sejm of Poland ratified a draft law initiated by the Senate to modify the Law on the Prohibition of the Propagation of Communism or Any Other Totalitarian System of 1 April 2016 (Law on Decommunization).

According to this law, all memorials established in honour of individuals, organizations, events or dates “symbolizing communism or any other totalitarian system” are to be dismantled. It concerns monuments – other than burial sites – to combatants and Red Army soldiers killed during the liberation of Poland in 1944 and 1945. The erection of new objects of this kind is banned. The definition of “memorials” themselves has been widened. It now also includes mounds, obelisks, columns, sculptures, statues, busts, commemorative stones, slabs and plaques, inscriptions and signs, in fact just about everything apart from the few exceptions mentioned in the draft law. It is also forbidden to name schools, kindergartens, hospitals, training establishments, cultural institutes or public buildings in this way. Altogether a total of 469 objects in the 15 Polish Voivodeships could be affected by the damaging impact of this draft law.

The draft law describes the procedure for adopting and implementing decisions to remove objects. The Voivodeships have the corresponding authority, but the only necessary condition is a positive recommendation from the Institute of National Remembrance. As we know, this Institute is unfortunately more engaged in destroying this remembrance.

According to the proposed amended legislation, the owner or user of the land on which the object is located will have 12 months from the date of entry into force of the law to remove the object. All expenses for destroying the memorial will be refunded to “law-abiding citizens” from the State budget. Owners of objects who do not meet the deadline must remove the objects at their own expense. The only instance with the authority to annul a decision adopted by the Voivodeship and the aforementioned Institute is the Minister of Culture and National Heritage.

The draft law will enter into force three months after its proclamation, following its consideration in the Senate and signing by the President of Poland. In view of the situation in the country, these procedures could be a mere formality and will be completed in a very short time.

This action amounts quite simply to an unashamed rewriting of history. The Polish provisions also violate the United Nations General Assembly resolution “Combating glorification of Nazism, neo-Nazism and other practices that contribute to fuelling contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance”, which expresses concern about attempts to demolish monuments erected in remembrance of those who fought against Nazism.

Laws of this kind play into the hands of those who think it is normal to tarnish the memory of the heroic common fight by two nations for liberation from Nazism. No good can ever come of historical blindness and hasty actions. It is true that we have problems with our bilateral relations, but how can they be resolved if memorials are destroyed and graves desecrated?

I should also like to point out that these actions by the Polish authorities violate its bilateral legal responsibilities.

I refer here to two documents. Article 17.1 of the Treaty of Friendly and Neighbourly Co-operation between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Poland of 22 May 1992 states: "Cemeteries, burial sites, memorials and other places of remembrance, be they military or civilian, honouring or commemorating citizens of one of the Parties, ... on the territory of the other Party shall be preserved, maintained, and placed under the protection of the law in accordance with international norms and standards and national and religious customs."

On the basis of this Treaty, an Agreement was concluded on 22 February 1994 between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the Republic of Poland on burial sites and places of remembrance of victims of wars and repression. Article 1.1 states: "This Agreement regulates the co-operation between the Parties in resolving all issues connected with the establishment, registration, arrangement, preservation and proper maintenance of places of remembrance and burial."

In the last three years, Polish officials have ignored the phrase "memorials and other places of remembrance" in both documents. Instead they have concentrated on the wording "cemeteries and burial sites". While Poland generally observes its obligation to preserve burial sites, the situation is the exact opposite when it comes to protection of memorials, monuments, commemorative plaques and other places of remembrance.

In this case, the "inattention" to the international documents by Polish diplomats and academics has an ulterior motive. It is explained by the desire to get rid, as officials have put it, of the "false sense of gratitude" to the Red Army for saving Poland. To do this, the Polish leadership is deliberately attempting to create an artificially distorted image of the Red Army in the Polish historical awareness as occupiers rather than liberators of the country. In 1944 and 1945, by contrast, there was no doubt among the Red Army soldiers or the Poles whom they liberated that they were indeed liberators.

At the same time, there are still people in Poland today who are capable of looking realistically into the future of our relations without any ideological constraints. We know of cases where memorials have been restored rather than demolished. In that regard, I should like to recall the Polish town of Milejczyce (Podlaskie Voivodeship), where in March this year, thanks to the joint efforts of the local authorities and the international charitable foundation of the Kronstadt Naval Cathedral of St. Nicholas, a war cemetery in which over 1,600 Red Army soldiers are buried was restored after having been destroyed by vandals.

The Kursk Military and Patriotic Society, the Sakva research association for rescuing memorials and other Polish organizations do great work in preserving historical memory. Locals provide assistance in this noble task. We should like to express our sincere appreciation to them for the respect they show for our shared history.

We call on the authorities in Poland to follow these examples and desist from destroying memorials to those who gave their lives for the Polish people and to take active measures to prevent the desecration of military burial sites.

Thank you for your attention.