

The OSCE Secretariat bears no responsibility for the content of this document and circulates it without altering its content. The distribution by OSCE Conference Services of this document is without prejudice to OSCE decisions, as set out in documents agreed by OSCE participating States.

PC.DEL/778/23  
8 June 2023

ENGLISH  
Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY  
MR. ALEKSANDR VOLGAREV, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF  
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1428th MEETING OF THE  
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

8 June 2023

**On gross violations by Latvia of its OSCE commitments on preservation of historical and cultural heritage**

Mr. Chairperson,

The protection of war memorials and war graves is an integral component of the effort to preserve historical memory. It is difficult to overestimate the historical value for future generations of these solemn memorial sites. Ways of preserving them can range from restoration work to the creation of museums and memorial complexes on the site of common graves. The desecration of these highly important historical sites is an affront to the dignity of and respect for these fallen heroes. Representatives of healthy countries, unburdened by historical baggage, strive to protect and support these sites as much as possible, regardless of political circumstances or opportunistic considerations.

Unfortunately, some OSCE participating States cannot pride themselves on taking a civilized approach in this sensitive area. The Latvian authorities continue to indulge in historical revanchism by ways and means that become more and more grotesque and perverse with each passing day. The unrestrained war on monuments and memorials did not seem to be enough for the Latvian Government, which has quite literally launched a crusade against the dead.

On 9 May, Arnis Āboliņš, chairman of the committee of the Brothers' Cemetery – the organization responsible, by the way, for Latvia's technical implementation of the bilateral Russian-Latvian agreement on the status of war graves – gave notice in an interview of the Latvian Government's unilateral decision to rebury the remains of over 500 Russian and Soviet military personnel. It was also announced that remains from collective war graves in the towns of Madona, Valmiera and Jēkabpils would be exhumed and moved to civilian cemeteries. Moreover, in violation of the relevant bilateral agreement, Russia did not receive any notification or request. These intentions were revealed in the media.

War grave sites are regularly desecrated and vandalized. At the beginning of May 2023, a routine inspection revealed several cases of desecration of Soviet war memorial sites in Riga, Jaunpiebalga and Valmiera. In particular, in early May, a collective war grave in the Bergi neighbourhood of Riga was repeatedly attacked by vandals, who sprayed red paint on the bas-relief and left obscene graffiti on it. The memorial to Red Army soldiers in the village of Jaunpiebalga received similar treatment. The position of the

Latvian authorities, or rather the lack of it, is telling. The appeals sent to them to investigate the incidents went unanswered.

The media recently released appalling images of vandalism to a war grave of Soviet soldiers on Vārnu iela in Jēkabpils. The frenzied Second World War revisionists barbarically removed the memorial plates and destroyed their foundations. It has only been possible to restore it thanks to the efforts of concerned activists, which is especially appreciated given the Latvian official authorities' encouragement of this kind of immoral, unprincipled behaviour.

More than 750 soldiers of the Red Army who heroically fell in battles for the freedom and independence of Latvia from National Socialism are known to be buried in this common grave. Among them are Guards major general Sergei Kupriyanov and Guards colonels Gavril Sharikalov and Sakhabutdin Gazeev, whose remains were reburied here in August 2022. Their previous resting place in Jēkabpils city park was also desecrated in February 2021. Then the cannon, once installed as a symbol of victory over Hitler's occupiers, was stolen from its pedestal. Its fate is still unknown. The structure was dismantled, and the culprits have gone unpunished.

The cynicism of what is happening in Latvia, a member of the European Union and claiming to be democratic, is outrageous. On the streets of its capital, followers of former Waffen-SS legionnaires march freely every year, and the destruction of cultural and historical monuments is an integral component of State policy. At this rate, it will come to the point where soldiers who died more than 70 years ago – among whom are representatives of all the peoples of the former Soviet Union, including Latvians themselves – will be labelled as a threat to national security.

The war on the dead declared in Latvia is a simple war, but it is dishonourable, sacrilegious and inherently immoral. We call upon the Latvian Government to cease violating its international obligations regarding the commemoration of historical events and to stop mocking the memory of its forebears, who fervently shed their blood and gave their lives to free Latvia from the horrors of fascism. We also appeal to the leadership of our Organization and once again demand that, in accordance with the mandates issued by the participating States, it respond to what is happening. It is time to finally stop pretending that nothing untoward is going on.

Thank you for your attention.