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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1170th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

21 December 2017

On the discrimination of national minorities in Latvia

Mr. Chairperson,

We are obliged once again to raise the question of the policy of the Latvian authorities, which is aimed at switching education in national minority schools to the State language. As we have learned, the Latvian Cabinet of Ministers recently approved the report by the Ministry of Education and Science on the complete switch to instruction in the Latvian language from 2021.

The so-called reform will apparently be carried out gradually, but implementation of the first phase will already begin in 2019. In that connection, calls by voluntary organizations to preserve the Russian schools and the autonomy of national minority educational institutions are failing to find support within the Government. The authorities in Riga are not bothered by the fact that through their actions they are violating not only their international commitments but also the basic principles on which our Organization is based. I recall that in accordance with the Helsinki Final Act all participating States are obliged to afford persons belonging to national minorities the full opportunity for the actual enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

There are all the signs of ethnic intolerance towards students, teachers and representatives of the administrations of Russian-language educational institutions in Latvia's education policy. Over a period of 20 years, the regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers have gradually changed in an effort to reduce the number of subjects taught in Russian. Currently, in senior classes at national minority schools 60 per cent of lessons are conducted in Latvian. Now, however, over the next two to three years, the Government intends to raise this figure to 100 per cent.

The directors of Russian-language schools in major Latvian cities are concerned at the total lack of trained specialists who could teach at an appropriate level in a non-native language for the pupils. Parents of students and administration heads of the majority of educational institutions believe that such a reform will have a detrimental impact on the pupils' academic performance and ultimately put them at a disadvantage compared to their

Latvian-speaking peers, both on the labour market and when applying to institutions of higher education. Furthermore, the President of Latvia Raimonds Vējonis, who earlier said that the country's educational system was not ready for reforms, has criticized this idea.

Against this background, we completely fail to understand the logic guiding the Latvian authorities in this decision. Perhaps our colleagues from the European Union can show us how to resolve this paradox.

We should like once again to urge Latvia to read its commitments more carefully, and the relevant OSCE bodies, including the High Commissioner on National Minorities, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the Chairmanship, to provide it with the necessary assistance in this matter.

Thank you for your attention.