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**STATEMENT BY  
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THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1421st MEETING OF THE  
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

4 May 2023

**On the continued gross violations of the rights of the Russian-speaking population by  
the authorities of the Baltic countries**

Mr. Chairperson,

We are obliged once again to draw attention to discrimination against the Russian-speaking population by the Baltic countries, where a wide range of human rights and fundamental freedoms are being flagrantly trampled upon.

Let us begin by considering violation of the right to freedom of movement and human contacts. Since the start of the special military operation in Ukraine, the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian authorities have stopped issuing visas to Russian citizens. In September last year, a ban on entering these countries through the external border of the Schengen area was introduced for Russian citizens regardless of the country issuing them with a Schengen short-stay visa.

In the case of entry into Estonia and Latvia, there have been numerous instances of pressure being exerted on Russian citizens by the intelligence services, including the demand that they sign a document attesting to their rejection of the Russian Government's policies. Similarly, in December 2022, Lithuania's Migration Department introduced a mandatory questionnaire for Russian and Belarusian citizens applying for visas and residence permits that contains questions about which country Crimea belongs to and about applicants' attitude towards the special military operation.

However, as usual, it is Latvia that has gone farthest of all. A decision has been taken there to revoke, as of 1 September this year, residence permits for Russian citizens who before acquiring Russian nationality had Latvian citizenship or were "non-citizens" of that country. A residence permit will be extended only depending on the results of an exam to test whether the applicant is proficient in the Latvian language at a certain level, and also on the basis of the answers provided when filling in a provocative anti-Russian questionnaire.

Such actions by Latvia in relation to Russian citizens are at odds with the country's domestic legislation and with the Latvian Government's international obligations. In particular, they are a flagrant violation of the principle of privacy and the prohibition of collective expulsion of aliens. They also run

counter to the relevant provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

The actions of the authorities in Riga also violate OSCE commitments, including the provisions of the Helsinki Final Act, the Madrid Concluding Document (Concluding Document of the Second Follow-up Meeting of the CSCE) and the 1990 Copenhagen Document of the CSCE. We believe that this topic warrants the closest attention on the part of our Organization's officials.

Mr. Chairperson,

The onslaught against activists and human rights defenders who hold views that differ from the official ones – that is, who are exercising the right to freedom of expression – continues. They are even subjected to expulsion, though very often there is no accommodation or work for them outside the country in question, and in a number of cases they have no relatives who would be willing to take them in and to house or shelter them. People are in effect being driven out merely because they want to preserve the right to access the Russian language and Russian culture.

To cite a fresh example from Estonia: Sergei Chaulin, a board member of Russian Compatriots in Europe (a non-profit organization), recently had his residence permit there revoked and he has been banned from entering the Schengen area for five years. In addition, under pressure from the country's intelligence services, the Co-ordination Council of Russian Compatriots in Estonia has announced its "voluntary" dissolution.

The law enforcement authorities in Latvia have, over the past few months alone, fined, arrested and begun persecuting citizens for displaying the Russian flag or for social media postings featuring that flag. In total, around 30 criminal proceedings falling under the remit of the Latvian State Security Service have been initiated against our compatriots, including for having taken part in commemorative events.

Mr. Chairperson,

The essentially sacrilegious campaign for the large-scale dismantling of Soviet memorials and cultural heritage sites under the pretext of the events in Ukraine continues at full steam in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. A corresponding legal and regulatory framework has been adopted for those purposes. In violation of Article 13 of the 1994 bilateral Russian-Latvian intergovernmental agreement on social guarantees for military pensioners, local government bodies in Latvia demolished more than 120 Soviet monuments between June and November 2022. The same fate befell more than 60 such objects in Estonia and around 30 in Lithuania. Similarly, under the absurd pretext of "glorification of Russian imperialism" plans are being drawn up to dismantle monuments to cultural figures, scientists and military leaders in city parks.

In February this year, the Estonian Government earmarked almost 1.5 million euros for the dismantling of 150 Soviet monuments. They have decided to set to work quickly. On 10 April, the local authorities in the town of Türi dismantled a monument to Red Army soldiers erected on a common grave and relocated it to the Estonian War Museum. And this despite the fact that the Estonian law on the protection of military burial places clearly stipulates that such memorials may not be torn down. In early April, three Soviet monuments situated in the settlements of Järva-Jaani, Ambla and Järva-Madise in Järva County were torn down. Only last week, a plaque fixed on the wall of a children's library in the town of Haapsalu to commemorate Prince Aleksandr Gorchakov fell victim to Estonian State vandalism.

The destruction of monuments in Latvia, which is synonymous with attempts to forget history, has been “streamlined”. In addition to hundreds of dismantled monuments to the heroic Red Army soldiers, a ban on celebrations to mark Victory Day on 9 May has now also been enshrined in law. The laying of flowers at the site of dismantled monuments will be treated by the law enforcement authorities as glorification of those objects and as “a manifestation of aggression”.

In December last year, the Lithuanian authorities completed the dismantling of the memorial honouring fallen Soviet soldiers at the Antakalnis Cemetery. They thus ignored not only the opinion of a majority of the country’s inhabitants but also the conclusion of the United Nations Human Rights Committee, which in October 2022 issued a decision on interim measures to protect the monument.

Furthermore, a law on the “de-Sovietization of public spaces” entered into force in Lithuania on 1 May this year. It allows individuals, legal entities and local government bodies to formally request the dismantling of public objects. These include monuments, but also street names and even name plaques in Russian. A list has already been drawn up. First of all, streets named after Liudas Gira and Salomėja Nėris will be renamed, as will Petras Cvirkas Square. After that the focus will be on 20 plaques dedicated to, among others, figures awarded honorific titles in the Soviet period, most of whom are Lithuanians. By the way, under this same law one can wind up in prison for wearing the ribbon of Saint George. That was previously punishable only by administrative penalties.

Mr. Chairperson,

The scale of human rights violations in the Baltic countries is off the charts. Unfortunately, the authorities in Washington, D.C., and Brussels, which are normally so solicitous about respect for human rights, prefer to quietly pander to all this. Nor do we see any reaction from OSCE officials. In our view, there is a long-overdue need to recognize the discriminatory nature of these countries’ policies and to help them in ultimately reverting to fulfilment of their international obligations.

Thank you for your attention.