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**STATEMENT BY  
MR. ALEKSANDR VOLGAREV, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF  
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1431st MEETING OF THE  
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

6 July 2023

**In response to the report by the  
OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Kairat Abdrakhmanov**

Mr. Chairperson,

High Commissioner, esteemed Kairat Kudaybergenovich, we welcome you to the Permanent Council. We have studied your report and presentation and should like to comment on a few points.

In your report you mention that the situation in Ukraine has continued to impact the work of your institution as well as the activities of all OSCE institutions across the board. We express once again our categorical disagreement with the biased appraisals of the Russian special military operation contained in the report and the attempts to assess the territorial affiliation of certain regions of the Russian Federation and the human rights situation in them. We emphasize that such assessments are not in line with the High Commissioner's mandate. Furthermore, while we recognize the importance of the topic of Ukrainian refugees, we are of the view that this kind of subject should be overseen by the relevant executive structures of the OSCE and its Secretariat.

The report states that your Office "supported the development" of the Law on National Minorities (Communities) of Ukraine adopted in December 2022. This law is a prime example of Ukrainian lawmakers' cynical mockery of the rights of national minorities in violation of that country's commitments under the relevant organizations. Hungary and Romania, which have large communities of compatriots in Ukraine, have pointed out numerous flaws. They noted that the law had not been properly discussed with representatives of national minorities and that their earlier proposals had been ignored by the authors of the document.

The provisions of the law concerning ethnic Russians can be characterized as nothing other than an exercise in segregation. During the time that martial law was in force in Ukraine and for six months after its lifting, virtually all the rights and freedoms of ethnic Russians were restricted, including the right to peaceful assembly, to receive funding, to establish consultative bodies under local administrations and to participate in international activities.

The lack of criticism of the law by international human rights institutions has paved the way for aggressive de-Russification and forced assimilation. An attempt is being made to internationally legitimize

the persecution of Ukraine's Russian speakers by the Kyiv regime and its Western handlers, which has been going on in the country for many years.

The consequences of this kind of Western "guardianship" can be seen in the southern Serbian Province of Kosovo and Metohija. It is well known that, for many years, Western mediators played along with the provincial "authorities", encouraged their anti-Serb policy and actually reduced the dialogue between the parties to a consistent infringement of Serbia's interests. Terror against ethnic Serbs is getting worse and provocations are becoming even more aggressive. The deterioration of the situation in Kosovo is a direct result of the neocolonial approach of the Western alliance States to the Balkan countries.

High Commissioner,

We urge you to pay close attention to the worsening situation in the Republic of Moldova. The leadership of this country is seeking to divide its citizens into first- and second-class citizens on the basis of language. Despite the fact that Russian is a native language for a significant part of society, attempts to limit its widespread use began in the first half of the 2010s. At that time, amendments began to be adopted, which led to a consistent reduction in the number of students in Russian-language schools. Since 2019, Russian can be studied in Romanian-language schools only as a foreign language, while the State language in Russian-language schools has become compulsory.

The authorities' policy concerning the forcible "Romanianization" of the Russian-speaking population is leading to an escalation of the situation. Attempts to build their national identity according to the Ukrainian scenario and on the basis of militant Russophobia risks aggravating ethnic issues and undermining regional stability. There is a clear potential for such actions to lead to conflict.

High Commissioner,

You also note that you are following the "possible impact" of the events in Ukraine on "minority issues in the wider OSCE area". We are surprised at the lack of assessment concerning what is happening in Latvia and Estonia, where, for the second year in a row, the authorities, because of their own historical complexes, have been viciously retaliating in increasingly sophisticated ways against the Russian-speaking citizens, "non-citizens" and Russian citizens living in their countries.

It is noteworthy that, having tightened the screws as much as possible in the educational sphere, the Latvian authorities are now beginning to roll back their own measures. On 28 June, the country's Constitutional Court declared unconstitutional the amendments to the Law on Higher Education adopted by the Saeima (Latvian Parliament) in 2019. The Parliament has been ordered to review a number of provisions of this law by 1 July 2024 as they contravene the Latvian Constitution and violate the rights to property, education and academic freedoms.

Having almost completely eradicated the Russian language from all spheres of life – of which you are well aware – the authorities in Latvia and Estonia have actively taken up the fight against alternative points of view that are inconsistent with their official Russophobic agenda.

In February, Latvian citizen Tatiana Andriets was arrested as part of politicized criminal proceedings. The activist Alexander Zhgun is also in custody. They are charged with establishing an organization with the aim of committing particularly serious crimes of a political nature and face up to life imprisonment for creating and managing the Telegram channel "Antifascists of the Baltic States". The Estonian authorities simply expel undesirable persons from the country. The latest high-profile case is the expulsion of Zoya Palyamar, an elderly woman with disabilities. Under the pretext of a threat to national

security, the Lithuanian authorities initiated a procedure to deprive the famous figure skater Margarita Drobiazko of her citizenship. The well-known public figure Algirdas Paleckis remains in detention. We expect you to respond publicly to these stories.

All this is happening against the background of the continuing shameful phenomenon of mass statelessness in Latvia and Estonia. According to the statistical services of these countries, stateless persons number 175,401 in Latvia (9.3 per cent of the population) and 66,592 in Estonia (5 per cent of the population). Thirty years since the establishment of the institution of the High Commissioner, it has still not been possible to eradicate this phenomenon.

High Commissioner,

We note the attention you pay to the discriminatory treatment of indigenous populations, including the Sami in Finland. According to international human rights bodies, for many years the Sami have experienced discrimination in education, employment and the use of their native language in everyday life. They have very limited opportunities to learn their language outside the places in which they are concentrated.

In addition, there are serious disagreements between the Sami and the authorities in Helsinki over land use issues, including the granting of permits to resource extraction companies, and over the participation of representatives of the indigenous population in elections to the Sami Parliament. The Supreme Administrative Court of Finland now has the final say when it comes to approving a person's application to be added to the electoral list, even if the Parliament has previously refused to do so. The Sami themselves believe that, in this way, the authorities are deliberately planting people into their Parliament who are unable to understand the specific needs of this indigenous population. Since 2011, the Supreme Administrative Court has included 161 people in the electoral list of the Sami Parliament of Finland against the will of the representative body itself. Incidentally, the Sami also face violations of their rights in Sweden, including the right to use natural resources. The representatives of indigenous populations often have to defend these rights through years of litigation.

Discrimination against indigenous peoples also persists in the United States of America. According to the non-governmental organization American Civil Liberties Union of Montana, literacy rates among the indigenous population remains one of the lowest. Children from indigenous families are more likely to be victims of discrimination in education. The suicide rate among young people is comparable to that of combat veterans. Native American peoples living on reservations face socio-economic inequality and a marked income gap.

High Commissioner,

We believe that you should continue to monitor closely the problems associated with the situation of national minorities and indigenous peoples "west of Vienna". All the more so because many of the problems are long-standing and entrenched. Experience has shown that such persons are often held hostage to political games and that the system for protecting their rights is very fragile. In these circumstances, your mandate of "quiet diplomacy" to prevent conflicts is needed more than ever.

In closing, allow me to wish you and the staff at your Office success in your future work and, of course, good health.

Thank you for your attention.