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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,  
AT THE 1270th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL  
VIA VIDEO TELECONFERENCE**

4 June 2020

**On the violation of the rights of national minorities by the Ukrainian authorities**

Mr. Chairperson,

On 6 June, Russian Language Day will be celebrated around the world, but it is unlikely to be officially commemorated in Ukraine. It is well known that the Ukrainian Government does not agree with the idea of the full preservation and development of the Russian language – or any other language apart from Ukrainian, despite the fact that the State’s obligation to guarantee the free development, use and protection of the Russian language and the languages of national minorities is enshrined in the country’s Constitution.

The authorities are continuing the policy of compulsory Ukrainization set by President Poroshenko. Under the pretext of protecting the State language, legislative acts have been adopted which significantly reduce the linguistic and educational rights of national minorities and the Russian-speaking inhabitants of Ukraine. We are talking about the Law on Supporting the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language, the Law on Education and the Law on Full General Secondary Education, which was signed by President Zelenskyi on 13 March.

According to the law on the State language, the Ukrainian language is to become mandatory in all spheres of life. The new practices are to be introduced through repressive measures rather than incentives. Fines will be imposed for violation of the law – in other words, the use of other languages in public. An oversight mechanism, the office of the “language ombudsperson”, has even been created. And this is despite the fact that according to the latest census, almost one in three citizens of Ukraine speaks Russian or a minority language (in fact, the number is much higher). Their views were clearly not taken into account when this new law was adopted. In that regard, it is worth citing the results of an opinion poll conducted in December 2019 by the Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation and the Razumkov Centre. It showed that 69 per cent of Ukrainians want to be able to freely use the Russian language.

The new fast-tracked education standards in Ukraine are no less severe. Their basic aim is to reduce the use of the native languages of the Russian-speaking population and of national minorities as much as possible. In particular, starting from September this year, all schools with instruction in Russian, Belarusian, Yiddish and other languages that are not languages of the European Union or of indigenous peoples must switch to Ukrainian. From 2023, education in their native language will also be unavailable for other

national minorities, including Hungarians, Bulgarians and Romanians. Of course, there are still private schools, but they are a “drop in the ocean” given their small number and the high cost of education.

It is significant that the Russian language is subject to multiple discrimination in education – both in relation to the Ukrainian language and the languages of the indigenous peoples of Ukraine, and to the languages of the countries of the European Union, for which the entry into force of the new rules, as mentioned, has been delayed until 2023. Incidentally, in the current academic year in Ukraine, 281,000 children (7 per cent of the total number) have been studying in Russian, 17,000 in Hungarian, 16,000 in Romanian and 58,000 in Bulgarian. But even with these statistics, the Ukrainian Government gives preferential treatment only to the minority languages of EU countries and of indigenous peoples. In other words, Ukraine openly divides its own citizens, especially children, into first- and second-class people. This is unacceptable.

Authoritative bodies, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, have repeatedly pointed out that these legislative acts are unjust and at odds with Ukraine’s domestic and international obligations. The OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Lamberto Zannier, spoke about this very subject at today’s Permanent Council meeting. Despite President Zelenskyi’s pre-election promises and appeals by Ukrainian members of parliament, in particular the Chairperson of the Verkhovna Rada Dmytro Razumkov, to re-examine the language law, the authorities have not taken any concrete steps to correct the language situation.

In addition to these laws, the administrative territorial reforms in the country are also introducing new dividing lines in inter-ethnic relations in Ukraine. In the first instance, they affect the Hungarian and Bulgarian minorities, whose ethnocultural communities are being artificially fragmented and dispersed for political reasons. As you know, the Bulgarian parliament protested on 20 May against the possible consequences of this “reform” for the Bulgarian minority. The Hungarians in Transcarpathia are also discontent. Their associations recently protested against the intention of the authorities to adjust the administrative borders within the region without taking account of the opinion of the local inhabitants.

It is a matter of concern that the Government’s policy of forced Ukrainization of all spheres of life, coupled with overt Russophobia at the official level, is becoming a catalyst for a rise in intolerance in society as a whole. Thus, on 27 January, nationalists from a number of organizations – Right Sector, National Squad, Freikorps – disrupted a peaceful rally in support of the Russian language and Russian-language schools. The radicals chanted anti-Russian slogans, sprayed gas and started fights. They even used physical force against elderly women. The police did nothing. There is no mention of prosecution of those responsible for the disruption. Another example: on 30 January in Dnipropetrovsk, youths from the National Corps disrupted the opening of the international film festival Film Assembly on the Dnieper, to which directors and writers from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Russia, Serbia and Sweden had been invited.

Educational reform is also producing a sorry harvest. On 7 March it became known that nationalists had harassed teachers at Lyceum No. 45 in Lviv, attended by around 1,000 students of different nationalities. It was said to be promoting “propaganda about the Russian world” and the “Russification of Ukrainian children”. On 11 April, the Ukrainian periodical *Vesti* reported on a campaign launched by nationalists against Pavel Viktor, a respected Ukrainian teacher, merely because he posted his Russian-language physics lessons on YouTube.

There are abundant examples of harassment on language grounds of entrepreneurs, singers, actors and ordinary Ukrainians, including children. We already spoke in detail here on 14 May about the dangerous

rise in anti-Semitism in Ukraine. Attacks continue on Roma, whose crowded settlements are frequently the targets of brutal aggression. Incitement to ethnic and linguistic hatred in Ukraine is systematic and goes unpunished.

President Zelenskyi said in an interview that the language problem in Ukraine is “artificial”. In point of fact, it was created by the Maidan politicians to further their own interests with complete disregard for the interests of the Russian-speaking population and of national minorities and with tacit approval by the West. This has already led to a bloody internal conflict in Donbas.

We do not deny that every State has the right to introduce measures to promote and protect its State language. However, these measures should not be discriminatory, particularly in multi-ethnic societies like Ukraine.

We urge the Ukrainian Government to stop its discrimination against Russian-speaking inhabitants and national minorities contrary to its international obligations. The OSCE executive structures and participating States should seek concrete steps from the Ukrainian authorities to remedy the very alarming situation in Ukraine.

Thank you for your attention.