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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1295th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL
VIA VIDEO TELECONFERENCE**

10 December 2020

**On the reports by the three Personal Representatives of the
Chairperson-in-Office on tolerance**

Mr Chairperson,

We thank the distinguished Rabbi Andrew Baker, Ambassador Mehmet Paçacı and Associate Professor Regina Polak for their comprehensive reports. We are in favour of strengthening the three Personal Representative posts and stepping up their activities. Their essential work must become more visible, especially against the backdrop of the behaviour of certain executive structures of the Organization, for example, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, which is trying to promote neoliberal and confrontational concepts under the guise of its interpretation of hate crimes. Support, even indirect, for pseudo-religious cults and sects engaged in destructive activities is unacceptable. At the same time, we should also like to urge the Personal Representatives, in particular Ms. Polak, to adhere in their work to the terminology and commitments of the Organization agreed upon by all participating States.

It is under flimsy pretexts that the instructions of the OSCE Ministerial Council in Basel in 2014 to elaborate declarations on combating intolerance and discrimination against Christians, Muslims and members of other religions have yet to be carried out. The situation needs to be drastically improved, notably in the light of the increased need for these documents in the OSCE area.

We have repeatedly stressed the importance of stepping up concerted efforts on the basis of a comprehensive approach and with equal attention to all traditional faiths. After all, with the rise in racist, xenophobic, neo-Nazi and other radical manifestations in the OSCE area, the rights not only of religious minorities but also of followers of world religions are being violated.

There is persecution of Christians, the desecration of their holy sites and the seizure of churches, and the persecution and even killing of priests. Some States allow flagrant meddling in internal church affairs and encourage divisions.

We note with concern that Christians, the religious majority in Europe, and Christianity, which has become the basis of European civilization, are facing serious threats. This is often accompanied by an increase in aggressive secularism and the persistent imposition of “religious neutrality” bordering on

religious intolerance. Things have reached the point where, in some countries, Christmas advertisements, which allegedly may “offend the sensibilities of audiences”, and even Christmas trees have been effectively banned.

In addition, Christians are falling victim to discriminatory laws and law enforcement practices. In this context, the situation of the parishioners of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Ukraine remains of utmost concern. The artificially created division in Ukrainian Orthodoxy has led to the lives of clergy and members of the church being threatened, primarily by right-wing radicals. Churches and their property have become targets of aggression. Many public and religious figures spoke about this problem at the Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting in November on the topic of freedom of religion in the context of modern technology.

Intolerance against Muslims is also on the rise. The migration crisis in the European Union has demonstrated that some States are unprepared for the consequences of the artificially destabilized situation in the Middle East and North Africa. Anti-migrant sentiments, often with Islamophobic overtones, are growing. Hate speech on the Internet is not uncommon, including at the instigation or even with the direct approval of officials. Attempts to equate certain confessions with terrorism continue unabated. We share the view of Ambassador Paçacı that this is unacceptable and contrary to OSCE commitments.

The rise in anti-Semitism is equally worrying. It is accompanied by attempts to falsify the history of the Second World War and to revise the judgments of the Nuremberg Tribunal. Judaeophobia takes various forms, including the desecration of monuments to Holocaust victims and to those who rid the world of the horrors of National Socialism, the rise in neo-Nazi and right-wing extremist groups and the glorification of the Nazis and their accomplices. This dangerous trend has been confirmed by the findings of the “Overview of Antisemitic Incidents Recorded in the European Union 2009–2019”, prepared by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. At the same time, the coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated the situation by creating a string of conspiracy theories even around the supposedly “Jewish origin” of the disease. We already covered this issue at length in the Permanent Council on 15 October. We will not repeat ourselves, except to say that the situation in the United Kingdom, France, Germany, the Czech Republic and the Baltic States is of particular concern.

We call on the relevant OSCE bodies, including the three Personal Representatives, to pay particular attention to these worrying trends. In conclusion, we should like to wish the distinguished Rabbi Baker, Ambassador Paçacı and Associate Professor Polak good health and success.

Thank you for your attention.