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**STATEMENT BY MR. ANDREY KELIN,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1026th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

20 November 2014

**In response to the report by Ms. Astrid Thors,
OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities**

Mr. Chairperson,
High Commissioner,

We read with interest your report on your Office's activities since July this year. Your country visits reveal that some progress has been made in safeguarding the rights of national minorities but also that serious problems still remain.

We welcome the fact that after a long interruption dialogue between the High Commissioner and the authorities and national minorities in Latvia has been resumed. We agree that the question of education in one's native language is still of prime importance. In this regard, the main thing is not to take any hasty steps without consultation with those who are affected by this policy.

At the same time, we regret that the report makes no mention of the trend towards reducing the number of Russian schools and pre-school establishments. We are pleased to note that the Latvian authorities finally intend to pay due attention to backing State-language adult education. We agree entirely with you that inspections, sanctions and fines are not at all conducive to improving motivation for studying the State language. We support your call for giving non-citizens the right to take part in local elections. This is only fair, as non-citizens, just like citizens, pay taxes that go towards regional development and supporting local authorities.

We agree that simplification of the naturalization procedure and awareness-raising campaigns would help to reduce the large number of non-citizens in Latvia. However, we are disappointed that, unlike your colleague from the Council of Europe, Mr. Nils Muižnieks, you are happy with the situation regarding the citizenship of the children of non-citizens. The registration procedure, although significantly simplified, does not automatically grant citizenship. The right to decide whether or not to grant citizenship in the registration procedure remains *de jure* a matter for the competent authorities. The failure to mention discrimination against national minorities in the economy and manifestations of intolerance

towards them is also incomprehensible. We trust that you will pursue dialogue with the Latvian authorities on these worrying trends.

We disagree with your focus on the position of national minorities in Ukraine based solely on language problems. While not playing down their importance, we would be interested to hear how you assess the massive manifestations of aggressive nationalism, pressure and invective directed towards representatives of the Russian-speaking population and other minorities. There is no mention of the unprecedented growth in nationalistic groups, the use of Nazi slogans, swastikas and the insignia of punitive squads. What does the High Commissioner think about the inclusion in the Ukrainian security forces of neo-Nazi paramilitary units that openly proclaim extremely radical and nationalistic views?

As for the Republic of Crimea, a constituent entity of the Russian Federation, we believe that it is not within the mandate of the High Commissioner to express political opinions and use incorrect terms regarding the reunification of Crimea with Russia. In general, the opinions expressed regarding Crimea have no justifiable basis whatsoever. As usual, we have at no time heard any real facts confirming the existence of a tense inter-ethnic situation in Crimea. And incidentally, there is no mention in general of the situation of other inhabitants of the peninsula apart from the Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians, although there are members of over 120 nationalities, including Greeks, Bulgarians, Armenians, Belarusians and many more, living in Crimea. For those who wanted to, the voice of the Crimean Tatars was clearly heard at the Warsaw review meeting, and it did not in any way correlate with the clearly politically motivated assessments in the report. It can only be observed that the Office of the High Commissioner unfortunately seems to be caught up in political games.

We are sure that the staff of your Office are familiar with the new legislative measures in Russia for rehabilitating deported peoples. The Republic's Committee for Nationalities is currently drafting a law on the framework for a State policy on ethnic issues in the Republic of Crimea. This will be followed by laws on the functioning of languages in the Republic of Crimea and on education. Moreover, discussion on these issues is not taking place in secret but with the participation of representatives of all national communities.

The Russian Government has adopted a dedicated federal development programme for Crimea until the year 2020. A huge amount of money – around 14 billion United States dollars – has been earmarked for its implementation.

It should be noted that when Crimea rejoined Russia the per capita gross regional product was a quarter of the Russian average, and the average wage and pension nearly a third of what it was in Russia. The transition period is now coming to an end. The measures that have been taken are already having a positive impact on the life of the population, including the Crimean Tatars. Pensions have already more than doubled, and by the new year they will have reached the average Russian level. The pay for public-sector workers – teachers, doctors, the staff of cultural and social institutions – is gradually being increased. A social welfare system for mothers, children, veterans and persons with disabilities is being extended to the inhabitants of Crimea.

The Crimean Tatar community is being involved increasingly in economic, social, public and political life, and its representatives play an effective role within the Republic's administrative bodies. For the first time the Crimean Muslims celebrated the festival of

Eid al-Fitr on 28 July, which was declared a public holiday, and a special State programme was organized to enable them to make the pilgrimage to the holy site of Mecca.

A land inventory is being completed, after which the authorities will be able to resolve the problems inherited from Ukraine regarding real estate ownership by Crimean Tatars and also the allocation of land to citizens on the waiting list before 18 March 2014.

There is nothing to say about the forcible issuance of passports. It is a strictly voluntary measure. Russian passports are not being issued at the moment. Almost 93 per cent of the population of Crimea have confirmed their desire to obtain Russian citizenship. By August over 1.6 million applications had been submitted by inhabitants of Crimea for the issuance of Russian passports. Those who wish to retain Ukrainian citizenship must apply within seven days for a residence permit.

In conclusion, I should like to emphasize that as far as we are concerned the mass statelessness and unprecedented growth in racism, aggressive nationalism and neo-Nazism are among the most urgent problems in the OSCE area. Draft Ministerial Council decisions prepared by the Russian Federation are designed to combat these threats. We hope that the High Commissioner will also concentrate on finding a solution to these problems.

Thank you for your attention.