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**STATEMENT BY
MR. MAXIM BUYAKEVICH, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1392nd MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

6 October 2022

On the continued gross violations of human rights in Latvia

Mr. Chairperson,

Latvia continues to commit violations of the rights of national minorities on an unprecedented scale, including violations in the fields of education and language.

On 29 September this year, amendments to the Education Act and the General Education Act were adopted by the country's authorities in the final reading. These discriminatory innovations envisage the complete changeover of teaching in preschool establishments and schools to the Latvian language. It will be implemented in the next three years. With this discriminatory step, the authorities intend effectively to put an end to more than two centuries of Russian-language education in the country.

As of the next school year, teaching for national minorities in preschool establishment and years one, four and seven will be exclusively in the State language. It will also apply from 1 September 2024 to years two, five and eight. The programme is scheduled for full implementation by 2025. This will affect 17 per cent of teachers and 24 per cent of pupils from national minorities. Native language (including Russian) and literature classes will be possible only as optional subjects. The budget allocated for this purpose has so far been very limited.

We would recall that Russian is the native language for a third of the country's population and the second most widely spoken language after the State language. Unfortunately, instead of taking advantage of the country's natural bilingualism, the Latvian Government sees it exclusively as a "tragic" consequence of "forced Russification" and a direct threat to the preservation of the State language.

Moreover, the fight against the "wrong" language has proved to be far more important than the interests of the 25 per cent of the country's schoolchildren who are Russian speakers. Even objective organizational problems, such as an acute shortage of teachers, have not deterred the Latvian authorities from their Russophobic fervour. Thus, in predominantly Russian-speaking municipalities and cities, such as Daugavpils, there are simply no teachers who could teach in Latvian.

It is clear that the country's ruling elite is once again trying to achieve opportunistic goals at the expense of the younger generation. Of course, the question of a pleasant learning environment for children is not even considered.

The total Latvianization of the education system violates a number of Latvia's international obligations, for example, Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, whereby "persons belonging to ... minorities shall not be denied the right ... to enjoy their own culture ... or to use their own language"; Article 5 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which lays down that "States Parties undertake to prohibit and to eliminate racial discrimination in all its forms ... without distinction as to ... national or ethnic origin, ... notably in the enjoyment of [...] the right to education and training"; and Article 5 of the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education, which recognizes "the right of members of national minorities to carry on their own educational activities, including ... the use or the teaching of their own language". Articles 29 and 30 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which provide that "the education of the child shall be directed to [...] the development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values", and that "a child belonging to ... a minority ... shall not be denied the right ... to enjoy his or her own culture ... or to use his or her own language." The 1992 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities is not being respected either, not to mention Latvia's own Constitution.

Moreover, the discriminatory steps taken by Latvian authorities run counter to OSCE commitments to protect ethnic groups. In particular, paragraph 63 of the 1989 CSCE Vienna Concluding Document establishes that participating States "will ensure access by all to the various types and levels of education without discrimination as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status".

Paragraph 32 of the CSCE Copenhagen Document of 1990 stipulates that "persons belonging to national minorities have the right freely to express, preserve and develop their ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious identity and to maintain and develop their culture in all its aspects, free of any attempts at assimilation against their will." Paragraph 34 of the same document clearly sets out the responsibility of countries to ensure that persons belonging to national minorities have adequate opportunities for instruction of their mother tongue or in their mother tongue.

Furthermore, the 1996 Hague Recommendations regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities clearly state that "the right of persons belonging to national minorities to maintain their identity can only be fully realized if they acquire a proper knowledge of their mother tongue during the educational process." Paragraph 13 states that "in secondary school, a substantial part of the curriculum should be taught through the medium of the minority language. The minority language should be taught as a subject on a regular basis."

Once again, we call on the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Kairat Abdrakhmanov, to provide a principled response, in accordance with his mandate, to the latest grossly discriminatory act by the Latvian authorities against the Russian-speaking population of the country.

Thank you for your attention.