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**STATEMENT BY MR. DMITRY BALAKIN,
DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1150th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

22 June 2017

On the detention of violators of the law on assemblies on 12 June 2017

Mr. Chairperson,

A national holiday – Russia Day – is celebrated in our country on 12 June. Huge festivities traditionally take place on this day on the main streets and squares of virtually all Russian towns and cities. It is true that this year on 12 June protests were also held in some places. The majority of them proceeded peacefully, without any serious violations.

Let me say a few words about the detentions during the protest in Moscow. I would remind you that the mayor's office in the capital city agreed in advance with the rally's organizer – the Anti-Corruption Foundation – on a place to hold the event, namely Academician Sakharov Avenue – a very symbolic place since Andrey Sakharov was not only an academic but also a world renowned human rights activist. However, the night before, one of the initiators of the protests – Alexey Navalny – called on the Internet for this action to be moved to Tverskaya Street in the very heart of the city.

The law enforcement authorities were obliged to issue the event's organizers with a warning. It was made clear in this warning that attempts to hold an unauthorized mass action would be a direct violation of the Federal Law of the Russian Federation on Assemblies, Rallies, Demonstrations, Marches and Picketing. In this situation, the authorities would be simply obliged to take all necessary measures to prevent provocations, mass disturbances and any actions leading to a violation of public security. Attention was drawn to this in the aforementioned warning.

Nevertheless, the organizers decided to converge on Tverskaya Street, where on Russia Day the historical festival "Times and Epochs" was taking place. As a result, the actors and artists involved in the celebration found themselves blocked by a crowd of demonstrators. Members of the opposition not only yelled insulting slogans but also caused a crush. Families with children who had come to watch the theatrical production were forced to escape a threatening situation. A member of the special police force (OMON) was injured in the process of detaining people breaking the law when protestors sprayed tear gas in his face.

Furthermore, the organizers once again involved many minors in their act of protest, encouraging them to cause a disturbance so that they could appear on camera among the people detained. There is information that they were promised money if they took part in the protests. In other words, the demonstration's organizers essentially used children as a shield, exposing them to unjustified risk.

As for the detention of Alexey Navalny, he was convicted under Part 8, Article 20.2, of the Code of Administrative Offences of the Russian Federation "Repeat commission of an administrative offence, resulting in the violation of the established procedure for the organization or holding of a rally". He was sentenced to 30 days' administrative detention, which was later reduced because he has two children who are minors.

It is worth mentioning that by no means all of Mr. Navalny's so-called associates approved of his idea. For example, the former head of Yukos, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, in an interview with the Echo of Moscow radio station described his actions as a "harsh provocation" and admitted that they were "an escalation game". A former supporter of Alexey Navalny, the sports journalist Dmitry Egorov, described the action as a "premeditated and brutal provocation" and "a show with consequences". According to a member of the Solidarity human rights movement, Lev Ponomarev, "Navalny was screwing over the protest movement".

I should like to conclude by saying that a significant part of the opposition did not support the provocation and took part in the rally that had been agreed upon with the city authorities on Sakharov Avenue. A stage had been set up there with microphones and anyone wishing to do so could speak. This action, incidentally, ended without incident.

Thank you for your attention.