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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE
1318th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

3 June 2021

**In response to the report by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities,
Mr. Kairat Abdrakhmanov**

Madam Chairperson,
High Commissioner,

We thank you for your comprehensive report. You have undoubtedly inherited a politically difficult legacy, multiplied by the serious constraints in connection with the coronavirus infection. We wholeheartedly support your intention to place the main focus of attention on the social and economic rights of national minorities as one of the population groups that are particularly vulnerable in the face of the consequences of the pandemic.

As it is, the situation with regard to ensuring the rights of national minorities and ethnic groups in a number of OSCE participating States has been deteriorating for many years. Under the pretext of strengthening the State language, we are seeing the introduction of language censorship aimed at complete assimilation and the destruction of national awareness. These phenomena are often accompanied by a dangerous rise in right-wing radicalism, neo-Nazism and aggressive nationalism.

The Ukrainian authorities are waging a systematic campaign to squeeze the Russian language out of all spheres of life. New provisions of the Law on Ensuring the Functioning of Ukrainian as the State Language entered into force in the country on 16 July. They significantly curtail the scope for using languages other than Ukrainian in public life, including the service sector. The quotas for the use of Russian – the most widely spoken language in Ukraine – in television and radio broadcasting decrease with each passing year.

It is important that “education continues to be a key area of attention” for your institution. We agree that “ensuring equal access to quality education for all remains imperative”. In that connection, we call attention to the fact that the Ukrainian authorities are depriving Russian-speaking Ukrainians and national minorities of the opportunity to receive secondary school education in their native languages, as was previously the case.

Information received from Ukrainian sources confirms this. According to the Commissioner for the Protection of the State Language (there is now such an institution in Ukraine), the number of classes taught

in the Russian language has more than halved recently – from 11,563 in 2019 to 5,421 in 2020. Such are the consequences of this discriminatory policy.

The statement by the Ukrainian Government that demand for the Russian language is falling because allegedly fewer and fewer people speak it is surprising to say the least. According even to the sociological research data “put into service” by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine in October 2020, the Ukrainian language is used in family and everyday communication by less than half of the country’s population – only 46 per cent. It is emphasized that in Donbas this figure is zero. This situation has been classified by the Ukrainian authorities as “threatening”.

In other words, the true purpose of the legislative regulation of the language sphere in Ukraine is not the popularization and development of the Ukrainian language, but a coercive change in the linguistic identity of non-Ukrainian-speaking citizens living in the country. This is at odds with Article 10 of the Constitution of Ukraine, which guarantees the free development, use and protection of the Russian language and the languages of national minorities. As for Donbas, it is also worth recalling paragraph 11 of the Minsk Package of Measures, which provides for the right of its residents to linguistic self-determination. We urge you, High Commissioner, to engage more actively with the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine on its mandate.

The decision to block the work of the Russian Centre for Science and Culture in Kyiv also confirms the biased politicized attitude of the Ukrainian authorities to anything connected with Russia. This occurred in violation of Ukraine’s international and bilateral obligations.

You mentioned that you were pleased to report that a national minority law is under development. A law on indigenous peoples, which would in effect exclude the country’s Russian-speaking population, is currently under consideration. I just hope that such a step will not lead to a repeat of the Baltic story with “non-citizens”.

We welcome your attention to the issue of statelessness, particularly in the context of expanding co-operation with international organizations. Unfortunately, for the second consecutive year, the Vienna office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has been unable to hold its traditional seminar on this topic at the OSCE. We hope that this year it will still be possible to resume this useful practice with the participation of the relevant OSCE structures, including the Office of the High Commissioner.

The problem of statelessness is of relevance to the OSCE and affects not only Roma and Sinti. In Latvia and Estonia, in particular, so-called non-citizens are not recognized as national minorities, which removes them from the scope of the Council of Europe’s Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. However, there are some 205,000 “non-citizens” in Latvia, which is around 11 per cent of the country’s population. In Estonia, the figure is 69,000 such people, or 5 to 6 per cent of the entire population.

In the context of the situation in Estonia, we agree with the point made in your report, namely that “it is also important that opportunities for education in and [study] of minority languages are preserved, especially in areas compactly inhabited by national minorities.”

At the same time, we cannot share your “positive assessment of Estonia’s efforts to support the integration of its diverse society”. For example, in early May the Estonian Ministry of Culture published its latest report on the results of the new integration monitoring cycle (this is done every four years). The results are disappointing. Of the non-titular population, 29 per cent believe that “they are not welcome in Estonia” (compared to 16 per cent in 2017 for an identical sample of 1,400 people). Furthermore, 38 per cent consider

themselves to be “second-class citizens” (previously 21 per cent). Some 30 per cent of those surveyed said that they faced intolerance (previously 10 per cent). Up to 70 per cent believe that they are unable to influence the development of society. Over 70 per cent of respondents noted that their career prospects were worse than those of ethnic Estonians. Ethnic discrimination also persists with regard to wages – in 2020 non-Estonians earned 15 per cent less on average. Moreover, in accordance with the policy document entitled Development Plan for a United Estonia 2021–2030, widespread and compulsory “Estonianization” of all areas of public life will in fact be imposed. This, of course, will not take into account the national awareness of the minorities living there.

For some time now, the Latvian authorities have been methodically squeezing the Russian language out of all spheres of public life, first and foremost in the educational sphere. In early April, the Saeima (Latvian Parliament) finally approved on their second reading amendments to the Higher Education Act, which introduce a *de facto* ban on study programmes in Russian at private higher education institutions. Not to mention the pressure on Russian-language media and the persecution of public figures.

We believe that the situation in these two Baltic States, which have been members of the European Union since 2004, should be the basis of your dealings with the European Commission and the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, and also of your interaction with the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe.

We urge that close attention be paid to the situation of the First Nations in Canada. As you know, the Indian and Arctic Inuit peoples there have been subjected to discrimination for centuries, which Canadian politicians themselves say was part of a “shameful colonial policy”. Methods of so-called assimilation included forced sterilization of women and girls, their killing and disappearance, and their compulsory placement in residential schools. I might add that a mass grave containing the remains of 215 First Nations children aged three years and above was discovered quite recently on the grounds of a former residential school in the city of Kamloops. According to media reports, between 1863 and 1998, more than 150,000 children, many of whom never returned to their native communities, passed through the residential schools for indigenous peoples.

Interracial intolerance continues unabated in the United States of America in the face of the pandemic, and racially and ethnically motivated violence is on the rise. There have been numerous attacks on people of Asian descent, who have been indiscriminately blamed for spreading the coronavirus. This is particularly worrying in that it continues against the backdrop of the notion promoted by some political leaders of a “Chinese origin” of the disease. Following the escalation of the situation in the Middle East, an explosion of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism has been reported in the United States. According to human rights defenders, there have been around thirty attacks on Jews there in the last two weeks of May alone. The situation became so fraught that it even required urgent intervention by the country’s top political leadership.

High Commissioner,

You will soon visit Russia. We are sure that it will be productive and fruitful visit. We have tried as much as possible to accommodate your wishes in terms of the programme for your visit.

In closing, we should like to wish you, Mr. Abdrakhmanov, and your team every success in your future work.

Thank you for your attention.