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**STATEMENT BY MR. ANDREY KELIN,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1031st MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

18 December 2014

On the situation of national minorities in Lithuania

Mr. Chairperson,

A large number of commitments have been elaborated in the OSCE and other international and regional organizations to safeguard the rights of national minorities. A special body, the Office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities, has been created to help protect national minorities in the OSCE area.

The Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) has published the results of the third monitoring cycle on the situation in Lithuania. Its conclusion confirms the concern expressed repeatedly by us in the Permanent Council about the problems of national minorities in that country.

The continued existence of a legal vacuum in the protection of national minorities is most worrying. The former law from 2010 has not been replaced and the political will to adopt a new one is evidently absent. Moreover, bodies dealing with the issue of national minorities, including the Department for National Minorities in the Government of Lithuania, have been disbanded in recent years. This has negative consequences for the linguistic and educational rights of national minorities.

We agree with the Advisory Committee on the need for legislative reforms in education, in particular with regard to the discriminatory nature of the 2011 Education Act. It is regrettable that, in violation of FCNM principles, the laws on national minorities in Lithuania have weakened their position in comparison with the situation when it acceded to the Convention.

We recall that there used to be a network of schools successfully operating in Lithuania in which national minorities were taught from the first to the twelfth grade in their native language – Polish, Russian, Belarusian, etc. – without any detriment whatsoever to the mastery by senior students of the State language. We have first-hand information about the excellent knowledge of the Lithuanian language by graduates of Russian and Polish schools, enabling them to continue their studies at universities in the State language. It would be

unreasonable to conduct educational reform without adequate preparation at the very least. In fact, the Advisory Committee called on Lithuania to proceed in this regard flexibly and without haste.

The Lithuanian authorities do not devote any attention to the professional training of teachers in national minority languages. There are also problems with the use of national minority languages in public and private institutions. Discrimination still exists with regard to the transcription of given names and surnames in official documents. The use of national minority languages on signposts and for place names in areas with high concentrations of national minorities is still problematic.

The conclusion also mentions the official policy of reducing television and radio broadcasts in Russian and the negative and politicizing attitude to national minorities by the Lithuanian media.

On several occasions we have raised the question of the growth of ethnic intolerance and crimes prompted by hate, anti-Semitism and neo-Nazi sentiments within the Lithuanian population, which are not taken sufficiently into account by the authorities. Discrimination against Roma is also a serious problem. The Advisory Committee expressed this very concern particularly in connection with the annual neo-Nazi demonstrations with the slogan "Lithuania for the Lithuanians" by young persons, whom the President of the country describes as "young patriots".

In that context, we urge the Lithuanian authorities to comply with their obligations to the OSCE and other international standards regarding the protection of national minorities in a responsible manner. Lithuania should not follow the example of other countries with discriminatory policies towards national minorities. It is important to adopt the necessary measures to restore the image of a State, which in the early 1990s served as a model to many of respectful relations with and allowance for the interests of national minorities.

Thank you for your attention.