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**STATEMENT BY
MR. ALEKSANDR VOLGAREV, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1449th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

9 November 2023

**In response to the report by the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for
Combating Trafficking in Human Beings**

Mr. Chairperson,
Ms. Kari Johnstone,

We congratulate you on your appointment to this high-ranking and responsible position and welcome you to your first Permanent Council meeting. We have studied your report carefully and would like to comment briefly on it.

Unfortunately, owing to the efforts of unprincipled Chairmanships – first Poland and then North Macedonia – traditional approaches to work in the OSCE have been undermined. This has also been evident in the appointment of the new Co-ordinator. As initiated by the Chairmanship-in-Office, this process has been neither open nor transparent, as prescribed by OSCE rules and commitments. We regard this step as yet another gross subversion of the foundations of the OSCE's work, and also of the relevant decisions and established practice.

Madam Co-ordinator,

Russia has always regarded countering trafficking as a priority task for the international community. We are convinced that it is the States and their relevant national entities that are chiefly responsible for protecting their citizens from this threat. No less important is inter-State co-operation, on both a bilateral and a multilateral basis. Our country supports international efforts to combat trafficking, with the United Nations playing the leading role.

We believe in the need for a comprehensive approach to this problem. It should cover the protection of victims and the prosecution of perpetrators, but also the prevention and eradication of the fundamental causes of the phenomenon. States should make every effort to prevent situations that could lead victims into the hands of offenders. In that context, the focus should be on the protection of persons from socially disadvantaged groups – illegal migrants, orphaned children, and women and children living below the poverty line.

The development of the situation on the ground also reveals other detrimental trends that exacerbate an already deplorable state of affairs. Reviewing the relevant European Union legislation, including the application of the well-known Temporary Protection Directive, to which the representatives of that supranational entity like to refer, many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and human rights bodies, such as the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, have identified a number of problems. Among them are the lack of attention to the gender and age details of arrivals or the absence of systematic registration of unaccompanied minors at the borders of EU Member States and Ukraine. Moreover, experts clearly note the creation by the Brussels bloc of multiple protection regimes for migrants depending on their ethnic origin, thus causing a real segregation of refugees. The sad price of double standards is well known – exploitation of human beings, physical and emotional trauma, damaged prospects and even death.

In addition, the practice of pushing back migrants, including children, is widespread in some EU Member States. In its concluding observations in 2022, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child called upon the authorities in Croatia, Cyprus and Greece to stop these inhumane practices, which contribute to minors falling into the hands of criminals. Such actions are contrary to the commitments of the States concerned, including commitments within the OSCE, such as Milan Ministerial Council Decision No. 6/18 on strengthening efforts to prevent and combat child trafficking, including of unaccompanied minors.

The United States of America is not unaffected by violations of the rights of minors either. According to the Subcommittee on Immigration of the US House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary, 85,000 migrant minors have recently gone missing in the country. More than 300,000 children have crossed the southern border, many of them subjected to various forms of violence and inhumane treatment. In general, relevant US NGOs, such as the American Civil Liberties Union, point out that in order to effectively combat trafficking in human beings, the authorities in Washington, D.C., need to make significant changes in immigration policy, including the protection of the rights of unaccompanied migrant children.

In recent years, there has been an increase in trafficking in human beings for the purposes of sexual exploitation, including of minors. Modern technologies are widely used by criminal groups to find and attract potential victims, and the relevant content is publicly available on social media. That being the case, it is more important than ever to combat the demand for “live goods”, which in a number of OSCE participating States is at an all-time high.

The assessment of the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings following a visit to the United Kingdom in November 2022, published in July this year, is bleak. It states that “the UK has not taken sufficient action to discourage the demand that fosters sexual exploitation in line with its international legal obligations. Demand is clearly a significant market force in the UK, as exemplified by the large online market for sexual services.” Moreover, according to the latest figures from the British National Crime Agency, there were up to 830,000 adults there in 2022 who posed some degree of sexual risk to children. This represents 1.6 per cent of the adult population of the United Kingdom. There are many other frightening statistics in the aforementioned report by your predecessor, Ms. Johnstone. We recommend that everyone reread it. Speaking of which, we should also like to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Valiant Richey for his more than commendable work in this post. I am sure you will pass on our kind words to him.

Madam Co-ordinator,

The problem of trafficking in human beings for the removal of human organs, cells and tissues, despite its covert nature, is also very acute in the OSCE area and requires constant monitoring by the

Special Representative. According to fresh data from Eurostat, between 2008 and 2021, this type of trafficking – along with sexual and labour exploitation – was the most common type of trafficking in EU Member States. We have also repeatedly drawn attention in the Permanent Council to the problem of the black market for organ transplants in the territories of Ukraine under the control of the Kyiv regime, where representatives of Kyiv and its Western handlers are careful to conceal the multiple evidence of this work.

Madam Co-ordinator, you should also be aware that during the military conflict in the former Yugoslavia, transplant operations were performed on Albanian territory not far from the town of Burrel. The evidence was subsequently described in the report for the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe by the representative of Switzerland Dick Marty. The parliamentarians then agreed on the need to bring to justice all those involved in the sale of organs. Albania's attempts to revise these findings are, in fact, a sign of encouragement and support for such criminal acts.

Madam Co-ordinator,

The OSCE has elaborated a robust set of anti-trafficking commitments. We need to concentrate on their implementation. Unfortunately, it is not the first year that attempts have been made to advance concepts that are alien to the legal systems of participating States. In particular, this refers to the concept of “survivors” and the extrabudgetary mechanisms set up to promote it, such as the international advisory council. We urge you to strictly follow the mandate entrusted to you by all OSCE participating States and to refrain from supporting dubious initiatives.

In conclusion, allow me to wish you, Ms. Johnstone, and the staff at your Office success in your work. We await concrete results in strict compliance with your authoritative and binding mandate.

Thank you for your attention.