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**STATEMENT BY
MR. ALEKSANDR VOLGAREV, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1482nd MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

11 July 2024

In response to the report by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

Madam Chairperson,

We welcome the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and thank him for his report.

Esteemed Kairat Kudaybergenovich,

Today you are taking stock of your tenure in this important post at a crucial time for the OSCE, one that has exposed all the weaknesses of our Organization. The report, which offers a comprehensive geographical and thematic review, shows that there are still extensive challenges in the OSCE area when it comes to protecting the rights of national minorities and ethnic groups.

The report rightly records “the emergence of numerous legislative and policy initiatives across multiple countries in the OSCE region that are placing an almost exclusive focus on promoting one official language, which is sometimes called a State or an official language”. The statement that “protection of urgent national security interests takes priority over a collective approach to security and multilateral mechanisms” is in the same vein. There is no doubt about the harmfulness of such approaches. They set States back many decades in protecting both national minorities and human rights in general. They often lead to the emergence of new forms of intolerance and xenophobia, such as Russophobia. Since the beginning of the special military operation in Ukraine, the Western alliance countries, above all the Baltic States, and the Kyiv regime that has joined them, have been taking repressive measures to eliminate the Russian language from all possible educational institutions and other spheres of public life.

In that connection, we are frankly surprised by the positive assessment in the report of the repressive actions of the Kyiv regime. Since February 2014, in other words for over ten years, millions of people in the territories controlled by Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s regime have been legally deprived of the possibility of using their native language, Russian, in virtually all spheres of public life. In violation of the Constitution, they cannot receive education, public services and legal defence in it. We have already explained the essence of the Russophobic National Minorities (Communities) of Ukraine Act in detail on many occasions. With the full acquiescence of their Western handlers and of human rights bodies, the representatives of the Kyiv regime have legitimized discrimination against the Russian and Russian-speaking population.

The obsession with forced Ukrainization has already led to the number of schoolchildren studying the Russian language falling almost 600-fold in two years – from 455,000 to 768. Moreover, there are no schools or universities with Russian as the language of instruction. According to the State Language Protection Commissioner of Ukraine, Taras Kremin, the practice of bilingual Russian and Ukrainian programmes on national television will be stopped from 17 July this year.

In April of this year, the Latvian authorities adopted a decision to abandon the teaching of Russian as a second foreign language in schools. And yet, according to the Latvian Ministry of Education and Science, more than half the pupils at secondary education institutions specifically choose Russian as a second foreign language. Over 40 per cent of the population use Russian as their language of everyday communication. We note your recommendation to the Latvian Government “to provide national minorities with opportunities to continue learning and practising their mother tongues, with adequate investment to preserve a high quality of education at all levels”. At the same time, we believe that this discriminatory step is a clear manifestation of chauvinism and calls for a principled assessment by international human rights bodies.

We are obliged to note that your appeals to Latvia regarding immigration reforms “to address cases through individual, reasonable and proportional approaches” have had exactly the opposite effect on this OSCE participating State. In the final reading at the end of June this year, the Saeima (Latvian Parliament) adopted amendments to the Immigration Act. The innovations extend the requirement for the re-issuance of temporary residence permits to a further almost 5,000 Russian citizens living there. Of these, 1,500 are military pensioners and their family members. They have to comply with the new migration regulations by 2025. If they fail to do so, they face the cancellation of their residence permits and deportation. According to the authorities, these norms are supposedly non-discriminatory and “necessary to ensure Latvia’s public safety”. However, conventional logic and common sense suggest that this category of citizens in no way poses a threat to this country.

The situation in Moldova is also deteriorating. The authorities of this State, encouraged by the prospect of a “bright European future” promised to them by European officials, are pursuing an aggressive anti-Russian policy and an offensive against the Russian language.

The concluding observations of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination published in May this year following its examination of the combined reports of the Republic of Moldova are illustrative in that regard. The experts point out that “Russian is considered to be the inter-ethnic language of communication of the ethnic minority groups”. They express concern regarding reports that “members of ethnic minority groups face discrimination in accessing employment, participating in elections, obtaining public information and accessing justice owing to restrictions imposed on using, and the refusal of public authorities to use, Russian”. This is despite the protection granted for the use of Russian and other languages of ethnic groups by the country’s Constitution and the provisions of the relevant law. The recommendations to the Moldovan authorities speak for themselves: to “adopt measures to ensure the access of members of ethnic minority groups to education, employment and health care and to ensure the use and protection of the languages used by ethnic minority groups, particularly Russian as an inter-ethnic communication language” and also to “strengthen access to mother-tongue education in schools for children belonging to ethnic minority groups ... and increase the human, technical and financial resources allocated to quality instruction in the languages of ethnic minorities”. Unfortunately, we do not hear such honest assessments from OSCE officials.

High Commissioner,

Alarming trends are also being recorded in the countries “west of Vienna” and they have long-standing systemic problems. Countries with supposedly progressive democracies have become hostage to their own attitudes. Their representatives have been busy for years lecturing others and ignoring problems at home. A striking example is the tragic events in French New Caledonia, where, in mid-May this year, thousands of people protested against France’s colonial policy. This was the result of long-standing tensions and growing dissatisfaction with the situation of the Indigenous Kanak people, who make up about 40 per cent of the population of this overseas territory. Moreover, in France itself, for the second year in a row the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights recorded an increase in racism, racial discrimination and the infringement of the rights of vulnerable groups. These problems, and also ethnic intolerance and discrimination against people of African descent in general, are applicable to many European Union Member States. This is confirmed by the findings of a recent report by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights.

The rights of people of African descent also continue to be violated in Canada. The International Service for Human Rights, an authoritative Canadian non-governmental organization, published data at the end of March this year. It states that “this form of racism is visible in all areas of society but especially in the laws, policies, programmes, decisions and practices of the governments of Quebec and Canada”. And that is not to mention the continuing legacy of slavery, the segregation of Indigenous peoples and neocolonialism in this OSCE participating State.

High Commissioner,

The institution you head was conceived by its founders as a mechanism for preventing conflicts at an early stage. Your as yet unknown successor is left with a very difficult legacy that will require his or her concerted diplomatic efforts, patience and wisdom. In the meantime, allow me to thank you personally, esteemed Kairat Kudaybergenovich, for your work and to wish you good luck in your future endeavours, and health, success and all the best to you and your family.

Thank you for your attention.