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**STATEMENT BY  
MR. MAXIM BUYAKEVICH, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF  
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1423rd MEETING OF THE  
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

18 May 2023

**On the Latvian authorities' gross violations of the rights of military pensioners**

Mr. Chairperson,

We are obliged once again to draw attention to the human rights situation in Latvia, where, as part of a wave of Russophobia, repression is being carried out even against the most vulnerable population groups.

Following the introduction of discriminatory amendments to the Immigration Act, in order to extend their temporary residence permits, Russian citizens who were previously citizens or “non-citizens” of Latvia need to sit an exam to demonstrate in-depth command of the Latvian language at an advanced level, and they must also fill in a provocative Russophobic questionnaire. Now, the amendments to the Act that were adopted in April 2023 provide for a longer time frame for the review of applications, but they do not change the essence of this repressive legislation.

Military pensioners consequently find themselves in a particularly vulnerable position. There are 4,864 of them in the country, with most over 80 years of age. Among these, 2,300 have Russian citizenship, including 600 who are subject to the aforementioned draconian testing of their linguistic proficiency.

As a result of these very strict requirements with regard to being examined on their knowledge of the State language, elderly people who have been living on the territory of Latvia for decades are being forced to leave the country. We are aware of more than a hundred such instances already. Significantly, it is often the case that even native speakers are unable to demonstrate the level of proficiency in the Latvian language required to pass the test. Such legislative initiatives run counter to Latvia's obligations under the 1994 bilateral intergovernmental agreement on social guarantees for military pensioners. I am referring, first and foremost, to Article 2, whereby persons in this category “retain the right to unhindered residence in the territory of the Republic of Latvia”.

Moreover, the other pensioners – those who are over 75 years of age and “exempt” from the exams – are compelled, under threat of deportation, to complete provocative anti-Russian questionnaires. In these they are invited, in particular, to condemn the “annexation of Crimea” and the “unprovoked aggression against Ukraine”, and also to endorse the Latvian authorities' sacrilegious “war” against the Soviet historical and cultural heritage.

The introduction of these obnoxious questionnaires is a gross violation of the right to freedom of expression and infringes Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. It is stipulated there that “everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference.”

The list of OSCE commitments violated thereby includes, among others, the Helsinki Final Act, whereby “the participating States will respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion.” In the 1991 Document of the Moscow Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, “the participating States reaffirm the right to freedom of expression, including the right to communication and the right of the media to collect, report and disseminate information, news and opinions.” These are just a few examples – the full list is much longer.

It would seem that the Latvian authorities, blinded by Russophobia, fail to realize that exerting such pressure on elderly people is also at odds with elementary principles of humanity, and that it essentially amounts to official abuse directed against them.

Thank you for your attention.