

**Statement by Mr. Konstantin Dolgov, Commissioner for Human Rights,
Democracy and Rule of Law, MFA of Russia**

Distinguished Mr. Pushkov,

Distinguished deputies and participants of the hearing,

Holding today's hearing is very timely. Despite the commitment to the protection and promotion of human rights both on national and global levels traditionally declared by the European Union and its individual Member States, the situation in this field in the European area remains far from positive. Moreover, many prominent human rights activists and international human rights institutions point to further aggravation of the situation with human rights and ensuring many fundamental rights, freedoms and democratic standards in countries of the European Union.

This circumstance was substantiated in the first Russian MFA's report "On Situation with Human Rights in Certain States of the World" published last year. This document is based solely on verified information from influential international and national governmental and non-governmental sources.

Human rights violations taking place in the European Union relate to the whole range of freedoms – the freedom of thought, conscience, religion, media, assembly and association, movement etc.

Lately a consistent raise of xenophobia, aggressive nationalism and neo-Nazism has been observed in many EU Member States.

The most acute human rights problems of the EU include human trafficking, in particular for the purpose of the removal of organs, insufficient child protection, in particular from abuse, sexual exploitation and pornography, violations of freedom of movement, rights of refugees, migrants and prisoners as well as restrictions of media freedom. Television channels constantly show images of violent and not always adequate use of force when dispersing demonstrations. The

situation of Roma living in the EU is still difficult. This by far not exhaustive list is contained, in particular, in the European Parliament's resolution on the situation with human rights in the EU. Many of the problems mentioned above are further exacerbated by the financial crisis that hit Europe. Mr. Pushkov has elaborated on the subject of violations of human rights and international humanitarian norms during the NATO military operation and the conflict in Libya.

The situation with ensuring the rights of Russian-speaking population in Latvia and Estonia as well as the unresolved problem of the so-called "non-citizens", which is shameful for the European community, are absolutely unacceptable.

Deliberate deprivation of citizenship of the Russian-speaking population by the Latvian and Estonian authorities is dramatic. In Latvia, "non-citizens" represent 15 per cent of the population. "Non-citizens" account for more than half of the population in largest Latvian cities, such as Riga, Daugavpils and Liepaja. In Estonia, "non-citizens" represent about 10 per cent of the population.

Despite numerous recommendations of international and human rights organisations, authorities of these countries create conditions for the self-reproduction of the phenomenon of statelessness.

In Latvia, dozens of rights limitations remain for the Russian-speaking minority, including such fundamental rights as the right to vote and be elected. We are determined to keep this issue in sight in the context of the upcoming elections to the European Parliament in 2014. We expect that the European Union will finally start elaborating voting rights for those Russian-speaking residents of Latvia who have been denied citizenship. About 50 employment bans concern professions that "non-citizens" can't practice. These include public, municipal, judicial and prosecution positions. In addition, they are not entitled to establish political parties and enter into real estate contracts without permission of municipal authorities. And all this despite the fact that they are generously permitted to pay taxes – which they regularly do.

In October 2011 the Latvian government approved the much-talked-of document entitled "Main Issues of National Identity and Social Integration Policy", i.e. in fact Riga's official programme aimed at the full and unconditional assimilation of the Russian-speaking population. At the same time, it declares commitment to the European democratic values that, in Latvia's view, do not include non-discrimination of national minorities.

The recent referendum on giving Russian the status of Latvia's official language has shown how serious the Latvian linguistic problem is. 25 per cent of the citizens supported the equal status of the Russian and Latvian languages. And this despite the fact that "non-citizens" were not allowed to participate in the referendum. It is a wake-up call for official Riga pointing to the need for a speedy change in its dead-end discriminatory policy.

There is a similar situation in Estonia, where the government has adopted a policy aimed at full liquidation of education in the Russian language. The ten-year education system development plan for 2011-2020 does not envisage teaching in public schools in any language other than Estonian. It is contrary to the current Estonian legislation.

The policy of Baltic States towards equating Nazi and Soviet regimes as well as glorification of Nazis and their local accomplices can not but cause concern. It is a strong factor of heating up extremist sentiments, nationalism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism as well as racial and religious intolerance in the society. And all this within the "democratic" European Union!

To give an example, former SS and SD soldiers and other Nazi henchmen hold regular marches in the streets of Riga and Tallinn with the connivance and even support of official authorities, thus dishonouring the memory of millions, including Europeans, who died at the hands of Fascists. Such condonation of the propaganda of neo-Nazi ideas causes serious concern, particularly about the prospects for young generations living in these countries.

Attempts to revise the Judgement of the Nuremberg Tribunal made in some EU States are outrageous. We consider it an open defiance to the whole system of

international law and a glaring violation of commitments on a number of fundamental international treaties and conventions.

We are particularly concerned and perplexed about the fact that the EU countries, including our former Allies in the anti-Hitler coalition – the United Kingdom and France, refused to support the resolution on "Inadmissibility of certain practices that contribute to fuelling contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance" that is adopted annually by the UN General Assembly on Russia's initiative.

Let me now give you some concrete – far from exhaustive – country-specific examples. The situation with human rights remains unfavourable in the United Kingdom which, judging from the recent report of its Foreign and Commonwealth Office on "Human Rights and Democracy in 2011", is trying as before to assume the role of supreme arbiter in the field of human rights and democratic freedoms.

The human rights situation in the United Kingdom is characterised by significant manifestations of racism and xenophobia; there are signs of infringement of the rights of Christians (we have all heard of the case related to the ban on wearing crosses that reached the ECHR level); migrants are continuously deported to countries where they are a priori in danger of torture and persecution by authorities.

Serious irregularities in the British penitentiary system, increased number of deaths in Immigration Removal Centres, facts of torture by British intelligence officers of terrorism suspects as well as attempts to introduce new elements of State regulation to the media market with respect to illegal phone tapping remain in the focus of the international community.

We expect that London will take seriously and with full responsibility the concerns about serious human rights problems in the United Kingdom expressed by human rights organisations, and will proceed to implementing in good faith the recommendations issued to the British side by the UN Human Rights Council and other international institutions.

The situation with respecting human rights in Denmark is ambiguous. Lately there has been a marked rise of xenophobia in the country. This is one of the results of the excessive toughening of migration policy by the authorities. Incidents of forced deportation from Denmark of citizens of Rumania, Hungary and other Eastern European countries have become regular. The unwillingness of the Danes to establish contacts with migrants from other countries resulted in the appearance of areas with mostly ethnically non-Danish population – a sort of ghettos.

According to the Danish Institute for Human Rights, there are cases of violation by Denmark of standards enshrined in international conventions. Human rights activists call on Copenhagen to establish a closer cooperation with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. From 2004 to 2010 Denmark not only denied citizenship to dozens of refugees from Palestine but also concealed this information from the Office of the UNHCR.

There are media reports that special websites operate in the Netherlands and Belgium aimed at gathering compromising evidence against immigrants living in these countries.

Problems with human rights have been accumulating in Poland which last year was put by the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly on the list of countries having serious problems with the implementation of rulings of the European Court of Human Rights. They refer to red tape in the judicial system, unfounded application and unjustifiably long periods of temporary detention, crowded prisons and insufficient level of medical assistance to prisoners.

The story with secret CIA prisons on the territory of Poland does not contribute to the European image of the country. There are records of gross violations of human rights norms and standards in these prisons, including the use of torture.

Given the impressive list of human rights problems in the EU, institutional shortcomings in the EU in terms of ensuring rights and democratic freedoms of citizens are striking, in particular, the lack of adequate monitoring and search for practical solutions to the problems.

In the EU the protection and promotion of human rights are a prerogative of the Member States. The role of the European Commission as well as the major EU monitoring institutions, such as the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights and the European Ombudsman, is limited. Accordingly, for the time being there is no proper critical analysis of the situation in certain EU Member States, which leads to the accumulation of problems and the increase in their scale.

In this context, we are following closely the progress in the EU on establishing the position of the EU Special Representative for Human Rights. According to our information, this decision is expected to be taken in June 2012. However, so far the future functions and the mandate of the Special Representative are not clear. It would be logical to focus the work of this institution, among other things, on the concrete resolution of problems with ensuring human rights and democratic freedoms that have accumulated in Europe.

The Russian side is open for dialogue with the future EU Special Representative for Human Rights who could become an additional channel of our contacts with the EU in the field of human rights.

Let me make it clear that we do not aim to criticise for the sake of criticism. We are ready for an equal and constructive dialogue with the EU on the issues of human rights and fundamental freedoms as well as democratic development that would be fully in line with the strategic partnership that has been developed between Russia and the EU.

The problems with human rights in the EU should necessarily be considered in the relevant UN institutions, first of all the Human Rights Council, as well as within the OSCE and the Council of Europe. Many of them are transborder problems and hence require joint efforts of States with a view to achieve a most effective solution. Russia is ready for a mutually beneficial cooperation with EU Member States in all formats. Such cooperation would profit significantly if European colleagues abandon the policy of dictating their priorities and stop looking down on other partners' interests and creating artificial classification of international human rights commitments.

In my capacity of Commissioner I am ready to do my best to contribute to achieving this goal through developing contacts with European colleagues on bilateral basis, in multilateral fora and with the EU monitoring institutions.

It would be useful to hold events similar to today's hearing with the participation of representatives of key international human rights institutions and civil society. It would also be useful to analyse the actual situation with human rights in a number of other "advanced democracies".