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Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY
MR. ALEKSANDR VOLGAREV, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1378th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

16 June 2022

**On the ongoing gross violations of the rights of the Russian and Russian-speaking
population by some Western OSCE participating States**

Mr. Chairperson,

The “cancel syndrome” fomented by Russophobia is multidimensional. We have already spoken about a number of its unpalatable manifestations. This time we should like to dwell on sport, which has also fallen victim to Western political pressure on Russia.

The politicization of sport did not by any means begin in February of this year. As far back as 2016, Russia and Belarus proposed for discussion a draft Ministerial Council decision on discrimination in this sphere. However, owing to the destructive position of several participating States, it did not prove possible at the time to reach consensus at the Ministerial Council meeting in Hamburg.

In various forums we subsequently flagged, year in, year out, the existence of this problem in the OSCE area. The response was attempts to feign surprise and to pretend that there was no discrimination whatsoever in sport and never had been. That is what happened, for example, during the bilateral discussions with the Norwegian Chairmanship of the Human Dimension Committee of the Permanent Council at the start of this year.

The relevant OSCE executive structures have also turned a blind eye to this, even though we have repeatedly exhorted them to assess these negative tendencies. Yet, in 2012, the topic of the first Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting was “Combating Racism, Intolerance and Discrimination in Society through Sport”. Both the Irish OSCE Chairmanship and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights considered the issue to be significant at the time. Now, though, it is a frankly awkward matter for several participating States and that is why it is put on the back burner in discussions at the Organization.

In the course of a decade, the situation in this domain has unmistakably deteriorated: from combating intolerance by means of sport, OSCE participating States have fallen so low as to engage in ethnic discrimination through sport. This has become particularly manifest after the start of the Russian special operation in Ukraine.

The principle of sport having nothing to do with politics, which was championed as long ago as in the days of Ancient Greece and which informed Pierre de Coubertin when founding the modern Olympic Movement, has been “cancelled” by the Russophobes just like that. It is disappointing that the impetus for anti-Russian hysteria should have been given by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). For it was the IOC that at the end of February, under the unseemly pretext of “ensuring safety” at competitions, recommended that sports federations ban Russian and Belarusian athletes from competing in international events. This was followed by the cynical exclusion of our Paralympians from the Winter Games in Beijing as a result of a series of ultimatums issued to the International Paralympic Committee by a number of countries, the wholesale expulsion of Russians from international sports associations and the removal of our compatriots from senior posts in international sports federations. The same pattern was at work in the way that our athletes were banned from taking part in tournaments and in the way that all major international sports events were relocated from Russia.

For example, the Russian stage of the Formula One World Championship, the Champions League final in St. Petersburg, the 2022 Volleyball Men’s World Championship, the 2023 World Junior Ice Hockey Championship and the 2023 Ice Hockey World Championship have been cancelled, among other events. FIFA and the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) agreed to suspend the Russian national team and Russian clubs from all international matches owing to the refusal of the Czech Republic, Poland and Sweden to play against our team in play-off matches. Did something like that happen during, say, the NATO aggression against the former Yugoslavia or its attacks on Iraq and Libya? No, because sport was always above politics. But not where Russia is concerned.

Strong anti-Russian sentiment on the part of Western OSCE participating States may be observed everywhere.

A case in point is what is happening in the United Kingdom. Thus, the Sports Minister, Nigel Huddleston, said at the end of March: “Russia is a pariah on the world stage when it comes to sport. They [Russians] should be treated as such and that remains the case.” Furthermore, he demanded of athletes with Russian or Belarusian passports wishing to take part in events in the United Kingdom that they provide written assurances that they were not receiving funding from the Russian or Belarusian authorities. Such a public declaration was demanded, for example, of the world No. 1 in men’s tennis, Daniil Medvedev, with his appearance in the draw at Wimbledon made conditional upon this. Similarly, Russian drivers and teams have been barred from all motor racing events in the United Kingdom. What is this if not political manipulation and official discrimination on ethnic grounds?

Russophobia has also hit Russian athletes hard who play for sports clubs in the country that holds the OSCE Chairmanship, namely Poland. It has especially affected ice hockey. The Polish ice hockey clubs BS Polonia Bytom, Ciarko STS Sanok and GKS Katowice have torn up their contracts with Russian players owing to their refusal to adopt “an unequivocal anti-war stance” and “unnecessary anti-Ukrainian activities on social media”, but also in connection with Russia’s “open war” against a “neighbouring country”.

Nor is the United States of America lagging behind. On 6 April, the Boston Athletic Association barred Russian and Belarusian runners living in their respective countries from taking part in the legendary Boston Marathon. Yet, non-residents were allowed to take part regardless of their citizenship.

Additionally, Russian fans in the United States and Canada attending National Hockey League matches have encountered harassment and discrimination: death is wished on Russians, they are threatened with physical reprisals in the street. Likewise, the wives of Russian ice hockey players have been declared “fair game” on social media.

There are a great many such examples: they are set out in a report prepared by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs that is entitled “On violations of the rights of Russian citizens and compatriots in foreign countries”, and also in a March synopsis issued by the Moscow Bureau for Human Rights and entitled “Violation of the rights of Russian nationals and compatriots abroad during the events in Ukraine in February and March 2022”.

Mr. Chairperson,

What is going on runs counter to a range of international commitments, including OSCE commitments.

Thus, according to the Olympic Charter, “any form of discrimination with regard to a country or a person on grounds of race, religion, politics, sex or otherwise is incompatible with belonging to the Olympic Movement.” A similar provision was enshrined in the International Convention against Apartheid in Sports (1986). In Article 1 thereof, unconditional support is affirmed for the Olympic principle that “no discrimination be allowed on the grounds of race, religion or political affiliation”. The principle of the independence and autonomy of sport, along with non-discrimination in sport, is laid down in a number of United Nations General Assembly resolutions, including resolution 76/13 (2021) and resolution 75/18 (2020).

There are plenty of relevant commitments adopted under the OSCE’s aegis as well. In its founding document, the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, it is stated: “In order to expand existing links and co-operation in the field of sport[,] the participating States will encourage contacts and exchanges of this kind, including sports meetings and competitions of all sorts, on the basis of the established international rules, regulations and practice.” There are also similar provisions in the CSCE Vienna Concluding Document (1989), where it is said that the participating States “will facilitate such contacts and co-operation among their peoples through such measures as direct sports exchanges on a local and regional level”. However, the contacts and co-operation on which our predecessors and we ourselves reached agreement within this very forum have been cast aside under the pressure of politics.

As for the principle of non-discrimination, references to it abound in practically the entire spectrum of commitments adopted over the years of the existence of both the United Nations and the OSCE.

Mr. Chairperson,

The aforementioned episodes are nothing other than the result of the Russophobia that is being fostered everywhere; they amount to the practice of collective punishment. What is more, it is a collective punishment both of athletes, who are being deprived of their *raison d’être* and livelihood, and of millions of fans for whom sport is an “escape valve” that allows them to forget about international discord, economic problems and politics.

These deleterious Russophobic tendencies and ill-founded discrimination in the OSCE area warrant unequivocal condemnation both by our Organization’s executive structures and by other participating States.

Thank you for your attention.