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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1163rd MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

9 November 2017

**In response to the report by the
OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media**

Mr. Chairperson,
Mr. Désir,

We thank you for your statement and report on your activities as OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, which you have presented to the Permanent Council for the first time today.

We see that new elements have appeared in your written report, in particular a brief summary of participating States' responses to certain inquiries by the institution. But for some reason such information is not provided for all countries.

We note the Office's continuity in terms of promoting media pluralism, protecting journalists and ensuring safe working conditions for them. We trust that sufficient attention will be paid to enhancing the quality of journalism, through the development of ethical standards and mechanisms for self-regulation of the media. This is not only a necessary condition for responsible journalism but also an important element in combating the spread of fake news and hate-mongering.

The role of States in this process should not be forgotten either. They are the ones bearing responsibility for implementing commitments in the area of freedom of expression, which has a defined framework enshrined in international law.

On the subject of the Internet, we believe that terms relating to the virtual sphere, which have not been agreed upon, should not automatically be turned into OSCE commitments. Nor do we agree with the idea of promoting the concept of the equality of online and offline rights. First of all, the Internet is simply a means of communication. The right to receive, impart and exchange information and opinions using any means of communication is enshrined in key international human rights instruments. Second, there is also an important difference with the Internet – its accessibility for users. Coupled with the

opportunity to remain anonymous online, it increases the likelihood of the distribution of illegal content and other threats.

I should also like to mention the phenomenon of the harassment of Russian media in a number of OSCE countries. They are accused without proof of propaganda, and attempts are made to justify the imposition of tough restrictive measures against them, which are far removed from democratic principles and OSCE commitments. We heard this openly during the last meeting of the Permanent Council. It is indicative of an inability to grasp a different point of view, which deprives the public of an opportunity to hear an alternative opinion.

The latest incident occurred just a few days ago. The Ukrainian Security Service banned yet another Russian journalist, RIA Novosti correspondent Zahar Vinogradov, from entering the county. The Ukrainian Government is doing all it can to prevent its citizens from receiving reliable information.

Your predecessor, Ms. Dunja Mijatović, emphasized that to combat propaganda it is necessary to bring other points of view to the public's attention. This is achieved by ensuring a diverse range of sources of information and free access to them, and not by bans and primitive labelling. However, we continue to hear hackneyed phrases and aggressive rhetoric from the Cold War days. In other words, the same propaganda, and this will get us nowhere.

Restrictions are also imposed on journalists within the OSCE, for example, during the recent Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on the role of the media. We have already expressed our regret at the decision by the Austrian authorities not to issue visas to representatives of the Crimean media community, who had registered for the event in full accordance with the regulations. Furthermore, the Austrian Chairmanship even refused to allow them to play their video message to the forum's participants. It is inadmissible that journalists living in Crimea have been subjected to discrimination and collective punishments for their choice.

There is another worrying trend. On the margins of the Meeting, official Russian delegates and journalists were subjected to threats and insults from representatives of the non-governmental organization Crimean Tatar Resource Centre, Eskender Bariiev and Aidar Muzhdabaiev. They even posted extracts from their hate-mongering statements on social media. We find such attacks to be unacceptable and call on the Austrian Chairmanship, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights to respond to these outrages and to take all the necessary steps to ensure that they are not repeated.

Mr. Chairperson,

There are problems regarding freedom of expression and freedom of the media practically throughout the OSCE area. We have repeatedly drawn the Permanent Council's attention to cases involving the harassment of journalists in Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, France, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland and other European Union (EU) countries, and we have not heard any concern about this situation voiced by the representatives of the United States and a number of EU countries. What is this if not hypocrisy and double standards?

In the context of Ukraine it is typical that almost immediately after Mr. Désir's visit to Kyiv, the Ukrainian security forces beat up and detained three journalists there – Dmytro Replyanchuk (Hromadske TV), Serhiy Lefter (UNIAN) and Kirill Malyshev (Strana.ua), who had been reporting on the protests at the city court on 24 October. Evidently, this is the Ukrainian authorities' peculiar response to the OSCE Representative having called upon them to counter impunity of crimes against journalists.

In conclusion, we should like to emphasize that we stand ready to continue to develop constructive co-operation with the institution of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. We also hope to hear from Mr. Désir in response to the questions we have asked.

Thank you for your attention.