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**STATEMENT BY
MR. MAXIM BUYAKEVICH, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1471st MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

2 May 2024

World Press Freedom Day

Madam Chairperson,

On 3 May, the international community will be celebrating World Press Freedom Day, which was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in 1993. It would, of course, be possible today to discourse perfunctorily on the significance of that date, to report on achievements in the information field or on national plans to support media outlets and strengthen trust in the media within society. However, it is quite obvious that there is no longer genuine freedom of the media. Double standards, targeted restrictions and unlawfulness with regard to journalists have virtually become an everyday phenomenon in the countries of the collective West. Universally implemented by them, and also by States seeking admission into that club, such practices as aggressive censorship, outright broadcasting bans and blocking of channels, the freezing of bank accounts, intimidation, defamation, pressure by the intelligence services and criminal prosecution of unwelcome voices, along with other imaginable and unimaginable repressive measures against media outlets that offer alternative views – such practices, I say, make up the real picture forming the background to the current media situation in the OSCE area.

Let me start with Ukraine. The situation there regarding freedom of speech has deteriorated to a critical level. All the media outlets in opposition to the Kyiv regime have long ago been banned; any manifestations not so much of dissent as of common sense are brutally suppressed and struck out of the information space. In addition, the Ukrainian authorities are actively continuing to go after Russian media representatives, war correspondents and public figures working in the zone of the special military operation and disclosing the true state of affairs on the ground to the international community. The latest victim of the NATO puppets in Kyiv was Semyon Eremin, a war correspondent for the Izvestia multimedia information centre, who lost his life as he was going about his professional duties. This journalist was killed on 19 April in the Zaporozhye region as a result of a targeted attack by an unmanned aerial vehicle belonging to the Kyiv regime's armed formations. We regard this deliberate killing of a reporter in cold blood as further confirmation of the terrorist nature of the Zelenskyy regime.

Unfortunately, we have yet to see the relevant OSCE institutions condemn this crime. Our appeals and demands for politicization of the media agenda to be jettisoned together with double standards when assessing crimes against media representatives were once again grossly ignored. Through their silence, the

Organization's executive structures are giving the Kyiv camarilla carte blanche to carry out further, even more horrifying terrorist attacks against journalists, thereby making themselves accomplices of that lot. We are counting on support from the participating States for our position on this matter.

As a result of the silence of specialized international institutions, the situation regarding the rights of journalists continues to worsen rapidly in the Baltic countries as well. Not a single statement on media matters delivered by us here is free of ever new examples of how journalists in those countries are being persecuted. The latest victim of the Baltic authorities' blatant abuse of power is the Russian-speaking journalist Svetlana Burtseva. She was arrested on 28 February by the Estonian intelligence services for "breaching anti-Russian sanctions" and collaboration with the Russian-owned outlet Baltnews. Somewhat earlier, on 7 December 2023, another reporter was arrested by the Estonian security police, namely Allan Hantsom, a former editor at a local office of Sputnik Estonia and editor of the "Estonian News" portal. To this day, both media workers are being held in custody. These are fine examples of solicitude for the rights of journalists and freedom of the media, are they not?

Similarly, the information space in Moldova continues to be suffocated by the censorship measures of the regime in Chişinău. This time it was the turn of the Canal 5 television channel to be designated a "threat to State security", and on 21 March, it was ordered to suspend its broadcasts. As noted by local media outlets, this happened after a reporter from the channel posed awkward questions to Moldovan President Maia Sandu at a press conference on 18 March. Also telling is a recent statement by the head of the Moldovan autonomous region Gagauzia, Evghenia Guţul, who is concerned about the Moldovan authorities' attempts to take control of, or shut down, public television in that territorial unit. According to her, GRT ("Gagauziya Radio Televizionu") is one of the few television channels where representatives of opposition parties are invited to come on air, and where they are not afraid of raising "genuinely acute and pressing issues". Ms. Guţul added that the current Government would rather do without such media outlets and perceives them as dangerous.

Where known measures for the eradication of all dissent seem insufficient, new, ever more refined tools for clamping down on it are invented. A striking example of this is to be found in recent remarks by French Foreign Minister Stéphane Séjourné about the French Government's intention to initiate, at the EU level, "sanctions against those who support companies engaged in disinformation and destabilization". We should like to put this question to our French colleagues: what about international obligations to protect the right to freedom of opinion and expression, obligations that you are so fond of invoking? Especially when it comes to Russia. The reaction by the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media to such messaging – or, rather, the lack thereof – is also startling. For what is the point, then, of holding numerous events, round tables and conferences on the topic of freedom of speech if all those who are on the other side of the information agenda and read the "wrong" media can simply be accused of disseminating fake news and added to the latest sanctions lists?

What some Western countries are doing to inconvenient voices is common knowledge. On 11 April it was the fifth anniversary of the arrest of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange by British police on the premises of the Ecuadorian Embassy in London. He has been continuously incarcerated in the Belmarsh high-security prison ever since. That the factual basis of the case against him is flawed, is no secret to anyone. His case clearly demonstrates the true attitude of the United States of America and the United Kingdom towards internationally recognized human rights and media rights, but also towards democratic values. After all, should Mr. Assange be extradited to the United States, the White House will in effect be handed the right to arrest all journalists and whistle-blowers who expose the US Government's crimes. In that regard, the European Union's stance on this high-profile case is also revealing. Through their silence, the authorities in Brussels are once again displaying their obsequiousness vis-à-vis the United States and

their reluctance to discomfit the United Kingdom. The European Union shows a completely different attitude when it comes to the work of Russian judicial bodies and to the rulings issued by Russian courts.

Well, we should like to wrap up by mentioning a very “fresh” example of infringement of the freedoms of expression and speech, one that is being widely discussed all over the world. On 20 April, the United States House of Representatives passed a bill that would make it possible to ban the social media platform TikTok if its Chinese owner does not sell the app to a US company. Should it refuse to do so, the platform would no longer be allowed to operate on US territory, which is a flagrant violation of the constitutional right of some 150 million Americans to freedom of speech. As in the examples cited previously today, we are not hearing any calls for the US Government to refrain from taking such a step, or laments over a violation of international obligations, or pompous words about the importance of ensuring media pluralism as an integral part of a democratic State.

Given the transformation of its information space into a closed, censorship-ridden and unipolar entity, and in view also of its encouragement for the imposition of an informational dictatorship in countries under its tutelage (such as Ukraine and Moldova), the West has completely forfeited the right to moralize about ensuring freedom of expression in other countries in the OSCE area.

Thank you for your attention.