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Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,  
AT THE 1279th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

3 September 2020

**On violations of freedom of speech by Internet platforms of the  
United States of America**

Mr. Chairperson,

We have already drawn attention here on several occasions to the gross violation of freedom of speech by Internet platforms of the United States of America. As promised, we continue to closely monitor any attempts to censor the global information space and continue to record the persisting alarming trends in this area.

Thus, on 28 July the video hosting platform YouTube, which is controlled by the US corporation Google, removed from its system the official account of the Tsargrad television channel and the affiliated Double-Headed Eagle historical society and Tsargrad News. As with the removal in May of the accounts of other Russian media, such as the Crimean television channel Crimea 24 and the news agencies Anna News and News Front, this was done without warning or explanation.

This is an especially cynical action, given the fact that once again it is the population that suffers. After all, more than a million people watched the Tsargrad television channel on YouTube. It is also known that this media outlet works closely with Russian cultural and religious organizations. In that connection, we ask what is wrong with hosting a resource that promotes the values of religious orthodoxy that are part of our global religious heritage. It would be interesting to see how the US public would react if, for example, a TV channel covering the activities of the Protestant or Catholic Church were banned in the United States.

This is another example of political censorship, and violation of freedom of speech and general access to information, not to mention freedom of religion, which is apparently taken so much to heart on the banks of the Potomac. Evidently, today's US monopolists are once again taking their cue from the Government in Washington, which is intent on cleansing the global information space of competitors.

As has been reported, Valery Fadeyev, Chair of the Russian Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights, wrote to the office of the Google corporation asking for an explanation of the reasons for the blocking of the YouTube accounts of Russian mass media and for clarification as to the kind of violations that would result in channels being removed without the right of restoration. We hope that an answer will be forthcoming.

Speaking of discrimination against Russian media on the World Wide Web, mention might be made of one further disgraceful incident. Following the example of the social media site Facebook, Twitter also started to flag the pages of government agencies and State-affiliated media. As with Facebook, the politically driven and biased nature of this approach is evident from the results in practice. While the pages of the Russian news agencies TASS, RIA Novosti, Sputnik and Russia Today, and the Chinese media outlets Xinhua News and China Daily have been flagged, Western media companies such as the BBC, NPR, France Télévisions and Deutsche Welle have not been touched. Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, which are financed by the US Government, are also allowed.

This is not all. On 1 September, Facebook and Twitter announced the deletion and blocking of pages and accounts that according to their information were connected with Russian organizations. Thus, Facebook deleted 13 accounts and two pages for violation of some service rules designed to prevent foreign interference. These pages were allegedly linked to the Russian Internet Research Agency. Twitter also announced the blocking of five pages, which it said it could “reliably attribute to Russian State actors”. At the same time, the companies noted that the investigation into the blocked media platform resources had been launched on the basis of data provided by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

We regard this as a manifestation of a systematic policy of double standards and discrimination against a particular country. In our view, the actions by these US information technology giants are an attempt to remove alternative and therefore undesirable media content from the information space. Some experts are already drawing parallels with the colonialism of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, except that today it is taking place in the global virtual space.

Moreover, these incidents are in clear violation of major democratic principles and international commitments to safeguard free and unhindered access to information, freedom of the media and freedom of expression.

The principle of freedom of information is anchored in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act: “The participating States ... make it their aim to facilitate the freer and wider dissemination of information of all kinds, to encourage co-operation in the field of information and the exchange of information with other countries, and to improve the conditions under which journalists from one participating State exercise their profession in another participating State.”

The 1990 CSCE Copenhagen Document notes: “The participating States reaffirm that everyone will have the right to freedom of expression including the right to communication. This right will include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers.”

The 1999 OSCE Istanbul Document emphasizes “the importance of independent media and the free flow of information as well as the public’s access to information”. The participating States commit themselves “to take all necessary steps to ensure the basic conditions for free and independent media and unimpeded transborder and intra-State flow of information, which we consider to be an essential component of any democratic, free and open society.”

In the 1991 Document of the Moscow Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, “[t]he 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.” Furthermore, they “will not discriminate against independent media with respect to affording access to information, material and facilities.”

Once again, we call on the US authorities to resume fulfilment of their international obligations regarding freedom of speech and the press. The future Representative on Freedom of the Media should, in accordance with his/her mandate, closely monitor and respond adequately to attempts to censor the global information space.

Thank you for your attention.