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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1273rd MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

2 July 2020

**In response to the report by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media,
Mr. Harlem Désir**

Mr. Chairperson,
Mr. Désir,

We thank you for your statement and the detailed overview of your work. We support the efforts of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media aimed at promoting freedom and pluralism of the media in the OSCE area, ensuring safe working conditions for journalists and combating disinformation.

The topic of information access has acquired particular relevance recently, not least in connection with the coronavirus pandemic. I would remind you that at the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in Bratislava it was in fact Russia that proposed a draft Ministerial Council decision on the subject, but this initiative was unfortunately blocked by some delegations. It is gratifying to see that among our Western colleagues there is now clearly a growing appreciation of the need to give additional impetus to these matters. After all, as the recent crisis has shown, people's lives depend on the prompt dissemination of information that is indeed trustworthy.

We agree with you that, in these difficult times, there is a growing necessity to provide economic assistance for the media sector. The Russian Government has already included the media and the publishing industry in its list of sectors affected by COVID-19 that are entitled to State support.

The Representative's efforts to foster media pluralism in the OSCE area continue to be relevant. In Russia all the conditions are today being established to ensure diversity of the media. Thus, our country's media landscape encompasses more than 70,000 media outlets representing the most diverse opinions. Over 2,300 television channels (80 per cent of them in private hands) are currently broadcasting in Russia, including 600 foreign channels. All foreign journalists accredited to work in Russia continue, without a single exception, to be able to carry out their professional duties in the most favourable environment, irrespective of their country of origin.

Unfortunately, not all OSCE participating States are following such practices. In France, for instance, the situation of the Russia Today television channel and the Sputnik news agency remains most dire. Despite carrying press cards and professional licences, correspondents from the former are still denied

access to the Elysée Palace and other government institutions. Moreover, French officials continue to foment hostility towards the two media outlets, frequently calling for them to be boycotted by the public. In so doing, these officials are invoking mere rumours, which, it is worth noting, have not once been substantiated in all the time that the outlets have been operating.

The situation regarding freedom of speech in the United States of America gives cause for concern. A number of foreign media outlets there are being subjected to overt discrimination. We share your apprehensions about the US law known as the Foreign Agents Registration Act. In addition to Russian (Russia Today and Sputnik) and Chinese outlets (China Global Television Network and Xinhua), the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation was targeted by the authorities in March. US legislation does not allow any of them to go about their journalistic work properly.

The battle against “undesirable” media is, moreover, being waged with the assistance of US-controlled Internet platforms. Thus, the US video hosting platform YouTube deleted, in May, the account of the Crimean television channel Crimea 24 along with those of two Russian-language news agencies, Anna News and News Front, which specialize in broadcasting from “troubled spots”. Meanwhile, in April, Google blocked the Federal News Agency’s official page and also a YouTube account linked to it. Another example of crude censorship is the social media site Facebook’s despicable initiative to add labels selectively identifying media outlets as “wholly or partially State-controlled”. The political bias inherent in this scheme is evident from the results of its implementation in practice. Thus, such labels have already appeared on the Facebook pages of Russia Today, Sputnik, RIA Novosti, the Chinese Xinhua News Agency and the Iranian Press TV broadcasting corporation. We urge the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media to monitor more carefully such projects, which are aimed at fragmenting the global information space and are being put into practice in ways that circumvent universal mechanisms.

Ukraine has not been idle either when it comes to censorship: on 15 May, the authorities there extended, for a further three years, the ban on accessing Russian websites and social media platforms in that country. I would remind you that 468 Russian Internet resources, including Yandex, Yandex-Ukraine, Mail.ru, VKontakte, Odnoklassniki and Kaspersky Lab, are affected by this.

The discriminatory campaign against Russian-language media in the Baltic continues. It has culminated in the unprecedented pressure exerted by the Estonian Government on staff of the Russian news agency Sputnik Estonia, who, under threat of criminal prosecution, were forced to terminate their contracts with their employer, the Rossiya Segodnya international news agency.

After Estonia, the Latvian Government, too, has decided to extend the scope of European Union sanctions against individuals and use them to target the media. Thus, on 30 June, Latvia’s National Electronic Mass Media Council in one fell swoop prohibited seven television channels operated by Russia Today from broadcasting. The absurdity of this blind aping of Estonia’s actions is evident. The restrictions imposed by that Latvian government agency appear even more absurd if one bears in mind that Mr. Dmitry Kiselyov has nothing whatsoever to do with those channels: he is in charge of the Rossiya Segodnya international news agency. It would be interesting to see the European Commission’s response if the Russian Government were to act like its Latvian and Estonian counterparts when handling the registration of media outlets from European Union countries in Russia.

Furthermore, the Russian-language First Baltic Channel had to suspend its work in Latvia in March, while on 11 June, the Saeima (Latvian Parliament) adopted amendments to the Electronic Media Act resulting in significant restrictions on television broadcasting in the Russian language. We find it disappointing that the vast majority of these incidents were not captured in the report presented here today.

In contrast to the discriminatory policies adopted vis-à-vis Russian-language media in the Baltic countries, Russia attaches great importance to the principle of multilingualism in the media and supports regional media outlets and similar resources for national minorities. A lot of efforts are being invested in expanding the opportunities for Crimean Tatars and other national minorities in Crimea to receive information in their native languages. More than 400 media outlets operate in this Russian territory, including 204 print periodicals, 33 television channels, 48 radio stations, 63 online newspapers and 9 news agencies. Judging by Mr. Désir's report, his Office is not very well informed about the situation with regard to the media and the local population's access to information in this region of our country. We urge his Office's staff not to rely on dubious sources when preparing their materials but to turn to us instead. We will be happy to put them in the picture as regards the actual situation with the media in Crimea.

We welcome the attention paid by the OSCE Representative to the safety of journalists. An issue that has become most pressing recently is how to protect journalists during demonstrations and rallies. We share your profound concerns about the wave of violence against media workers and the increasing number of detentions of journalists on unsubstantiated charges in the United States. Thus, human rights defenders recorded 455 incidents of aggression against media workers in the first half of this year, including: 62 arrests; 106 physical attacks (of which 64 were carried out by the police); 58 and 35 instances of, respectively, tear gas and pepper spray being used; 97 incidents in which journalists were hit by rubber bullets; and 63 instances of their equipment being damaged.

Among the journalists who have suffered from police violence, despite being in possession of documents clearly identifying them as such, are two Russian citizens: Mr. Mikhail Turgiyev, a RIA Novosti correspondent, and Ms. Nicole Roussell, a producer at the Sputnik news agency. The police's use of riot gear, including rubber bullets and tear gas, against media workers who are carrying out their duties is in our view unacceptable. We expect the competent authorities in the United States to investigate these incidents thoroughly, and the OSCE Representative to keep a very close watch on this matter until the perpetrators have been held fully accountable.

The situation regarding the safety of journalists remains critical in Ukraine as well. Progress has still not been made in investigating the murders of Anatoly Klyan, Anton Voloshin, Igor Kornelyuk, Andrey Stenin, Andrea Rocchelli, Oles Buzina, Sergey Dolgov, Vyacheslav Veremiy, Pavel Sheremet and Vadim Komarov, who was killed just over a year ago. As Serhiy Tomilenko, head of the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine, put it, Mr. Komarov's violent death sends a clear signal to journalists that they should not dare to raise "awkward" topics or criticize the authorities. According to statistics from the National Union of Journalists, 30 assaults on members of the press have been recorded in Ukraine for the period since the start of this year alone. Moreover, according to the Verkhovna Rada's (Ukrainian Parliament's) Commissioner for Human Rights, Lyudmyla Denisova, there have been no less than 91 violations of freedom of speech between January and May, of which as many as 66 involved the use of physical force against reporters.

Furthermore, the abominable Mirotvorets website, hosted on servers that are located in the United States, continues to operate and is regularly updated. By divulging the personal data of media workers, this website is putting their lives at immediate risk.

By way of conclusion, we wish to stress that Russia is conscientiously co-operating with the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media on a wide range of matters: from enquiries about the situation in Russia to developments in the information space in the OSCE area as a whole. We expect our own concerns to be heeded in return.

Thank you for your attention.