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**STATEMENT BY  
MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE  
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1346th MEETING OF THE OSCE  
PERMANENT COUNCIL**

25 November 2021

**In response to the report by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media,  
Ms. Teresa Ribeiro**

Ms. Ribeiro,

We thank you for your statement and the detailed overview of your work. We support your efforts related to promoting freedom and pluralism of the media in the OSCE area, ensuring safe working conditions for journalists, combating disinformation and analysing the impact of artificial intelligence on human rights. At the same time, having studied your report, we should like to caution you and the staff of your Office against attempts to interfere in issues concerning the status of territories. That is not covered by your mandate. Becoming involved in such activities is not conducive to strengthening the authority of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media as an institution.

We respect the method of “silent diplomacy” that you have selected for analysing and assessing the media situation in this or that State. Nevertheless, we are of the view that this principle is not always appropriate. When dealing with, say, situations in which media outlets are being stigmatized on the grounds of nationality or editorial policy, the Media Representative should raise his or her voice in public.

A case in point is the deteriorating situation regarding press freedom in Ukraine. The authorities are continuing their policy of wholesale extirpation of “undesirable” sources of information from the information space. Any media resources that do not toe the line of the country’s leadership are blocked or banned. One could not possibly list them all. I would remind you that we are talking about 468 Internet resources, including Yandex, Yandex-Ukraine, Mail.ru, VKontakte, Odnoklassniki and Kaspersky Lab, and virtually all Russian-owned media without exception, including Channel One, NTV, VGTRK, the Rossiya Segodnya news agency and the television channel Spas.

A few days ago, another major outlet was shut down in Ukraine, namely the country’s only English-language newspaper, *Kyiv Post*, which had existed since 1995. According to the newspaper’s journalists, pressure on its owner by the authorities was the reason behind the suspension of its work. The aim was “getting rid of inconvenient, fair and honest journalists”. By the way, the situation surrounding the shutting down of *Kyiv Post* vividly illustrates the double standards of a number of participating States. Representatives of the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Germany and the European Union

almost instantaneously voiced their concern over the silencing of “one of the most important media voices in Ukraine”. Sweden’s Ambassador to Ukraine, Tobias Thyberg, emphasized that “[f]ree & independent media in Ukraine needs defence on multiple fronts.”

Where, though, was the response by the representatives of these countries to the earlier measures taken by the Ukrainian authorities to purge the information space of “undesirable” media? Did they respond, for example, to the extrajudicial punishment meted out by the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine to the major non-State television channels ZIK, 112 Ukraine and NewsOne? I would remind you that in February of this year, President Zelenskyy issued a decree confirming the Council’s decision to shut down eight television companies, including the three aforementioned national television channels. This was done without any trial or investigation; the companies’ staff were deprived of the right to legitimate protection.

No public response was forthcoming either to the open letter sent by the employees of the shut-down outlets to the foreign ministers of some EU countries and to senior officials at a number of international organizations in September and October of this year. In this letter, the journalists in question called for attention to be paid to the situation regarding freedom of speech in Ukraine and for pressure to be brought to bear on its Government. The letter points out that “the Ukrainian authorities have gone beyond all reasonable bounds and continue to flout Ukrainian legislation and international norms as they engage in the targeted destruction of freedom of speech in Ukraine.” “Our aim is not to fight the current authorities. As journalists, we merely want to continue to work ...”, these media workers stressed. A further letter expressed concern over provocations by right-wing radical groups against journalists whom they considered to profess the “wrong” political views. The most recent example was the attack perpetrated by several dozen radicals on staff from the Ukrainian national television channel Nash in Sumy on 30 October: journalists and cameramen there were beaten up on live television. In the view of the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine, attacks on journalists have become a “constant reality” there. Thus, according to the head of the Union, Serhii Tomilenko, beatings, the torching of cars, the damaging of equipment and other acts of violence against journalists are recorded every five days in Ukraine. Moreover, the murders of 17 journalists committed between 2014 and 2020 continue to go uninvestigated.

A challenging situation has also emerged in some EU States as far as ensuring the safety of journalists is concerned. A rise in the number of threats and attacks against journalists has been noted by the European Commission as well. Thus, as reported by the Commission, 908 media workers were attacked in 2020, while 175 were caught up as victims in incidents during protests.

Although the EU authorities in Brussels grandiloquently declare their intention to set about remedying the situation, they do not move beyond words. Excesses against journalists and, likewise, numerous instances of censorship continue to be hushed up under the pretext of combating disinformation. For example, a wide range of repressive measures are being applied against members of the press in the Baltic States, including detentions, interrogations, searches, confiscation of equipment and the closing of bank accounts.

Here are some fresh examples. In Latvia we have the revocation of the licence of one of the most popular information resources among the country’s Russian-speaking inhabitants, namely the First Baltic Channel; the filing of criminal charges against 14 journalists working with Russian-owned Sputnik Latvia; and the prison sentence handed down to the well-known opposition publicist Yuri Alekseev.

Estonia continues to flagrantly flout the basic principles of freedom of the media and to restrict the population’s access to alternative sources of information. We would remind you that the Tallinn office of the Russian news agency Sputnik ceased to operate in January 2020 owing to pressure from the Estonian law

enforcement authorities. This is something, Ms. Ribeiro, that your predecessor, Harlem Désir, was well informed about: at the time, he publicly called upon the Estonian authorities to stop exerting pressure on that news agency. Evidently, this turning of a blind eye to the arbitrariness prevailing there is interpreted by the Estonian Government as *carte blanche* to purge the country's information space further. This is confirmed by the arrest of the Baltnews contributor Sergey Seredenko in March of this year on politically motivated charges, and also by the pressure currently being exerted both by the authorities and by Estonian financial institutions on the recently established Sputnik Media Internet resource.

Journalists' rights continue to be violated in other EU States too. The police in Poland recently detained a film crew from the television channel Russia Today France for seven hours at the Polish-Belarusian border. In this respect, we share the view of the General Secretary of the European Federation of Journalists, Ricardo Gutiérrez, who stated that the aforementioned incident was "an obvious violation of European press freedom standards". He further noted: "We – the European Federation of Journalists – do not hesitate to call it censorship. This is an act of censorship by the Polish Government. ... This is a situation incomprehensible to the mind! We see no reason for the Polish authorities to establish censorship in this zone, which deserves the attention of the media."

We have taken note in this regard, Ms. Ribeiro, of your remarks in which you pointed out that you were monitoring what was happening. However, in situations of this kind, monitoring is clearly insufficient: you must make an unflinching assessment. After all, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, an international non-governmental organization, the rights of at least seven foreign journalists covering the situation at the Polish-Belarusian border were flagrantly violated by the Polish authorities.

We share your concerns over the arrest of two journalists covering protests in Canada and over the rise in violence against journalists in the United States. The number of such crimes increased more than tenfold in the United States in 2020. It is particularly alarming that aggressive actions were committed not only by the protesters but also by US police officers, who used a wide array of repressive methods, ranging from the firing of rubber bullets and the spraying of chemical irritants in the faces of journalists to threats and persecution. Nor has the situation improved after the advent of a new administration in the White House. Thus, according to the US Press Freedom Tracker, an NGO, since the start of this year alone there have been 135 assaults on journalists (of which around a half were committed by law enforcement officers), 55 arrests of journalists and 34 instances in which the equipment of journalists was damaged.

Speaking of journalists' rights, I cannot fail to mention the detained Australian independent journalist Julian Assange. As you know, he faces extradition to the United States, where he may receive up to 175 years in prison, if not the death penalty. Neither journalists, nor civil society have any doubts as to the political nature of this case. The hearing of the US Government's appeal against the decision blocking Mr. Assange's extradition concluded at the UK High Court of Justice on 28 October of this year. Now the High Court must decide whether to side with the arguments of the United States or to heed the counsel for the defence of the founder of WikiLeaks. To quote Rebecca Vincent, a director of the NGO Reporters Without Borders, it is clear that "lawyers are simply playing with Julian's life on behalf of the US Government." She added: "We believe that he was targeted because of his contributions to journalism; no one should be charged with such crimes for publishing information." In general, Mr. Assange's plight and the part played by the US Government in the persecution of him deserve to be addressed separately in detail.

The battle against "undesirable" journalists and media resources is also being waged with the assistance of US-controlled Internet platforms. We have repeatedly drawn your attention, Ms. Ribeiro, to instances of flagrant censorship of the information space by the "new media". The latest egregious example is YouTube's deletion, under a spurious pretext, of Russia Today's German-language channels "RT DE" and "Der fehlende Part" ("The missing piece"). There can be no doubt that YouTube ventured to undertake

such unlawful actions with the explicit and implicit support of the German authorities, which for many years have been unashamedly and in effect openly harassing correspondents from Russian broadcasters by, for example, blocking their bank accounts or slandering them in public.

It is for this reason, among others, that the need for the development of rules and standards governing the activities of the Big Tech companies is becoming increasingly acute. After all, as recently confirmed by Frances Haugen, a former Facebook employee, when testifying before the members of the European Parliament, information technology companies put their financial interests above users' safety, not to mention human rights. As she argued, their managers have long known about, for example, the harmful effect of Instagram on the adolescent psyche because of that platform's focus on "social comparison" and "bodies". Or about the way in which Facebook promotes content inciting violence and hatred by designing its algorithms in such a way that people spend as much time as possible on futile discussions, insulting one another in their comments – that is how the company makes its profits.

We are aware of the difficult conditions under which the Media Representative and his or her Office must operate: media issues in the OSCE area are highly politicized and the community of professional journalists is essentially at the mercy of political opportunism. But that is how it is: in such a situation, principled approaches to the implementation of one's mandate – including a public and geographically balanced response to encroachments on freedom of speech and the media – and the ability to adapt to new challenges in the media environment are in greater demand than ever before.

Russia co-operates in good faith with the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, not least on requests for information regarding the situation in Russia. We expect our own concerns to be heeded in return. We wish you, Ms. Ribeiro, and your Office's staff every success and the best of health.

Thank you for your attention.