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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1203rd MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

22 November 2018

**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 review of your activities during the period covered by your report. We welcome your Office's active involvement in the wide range of questions that fall under its mandate. We note the efforts to promote free access to information, safe working conditions for journalists, and media freedom and pluralism.

We are unfortunately obliged to note that in the modern world, under the pretext of combating propaganda and fake news, a campaign to segregate the press and divide it into the right and wrong kind is gathering momentum. For example, the development of certain "journalism trust indicators" was initiated by Reporters Without Borders in conjunction with the French authorities, with media outlet whitelists being drawn up within the framework of the initiative. Such trends can be extremely dangerous. We fully share the view of the former OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and current Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Dunja Mijatović, that propaganda should be combated not by prohibitions but by the dissemination of genuine information.

Another Reporters Without Borders initiative regarding the adoption of the International Declaration on Information and Democracy that was presented to the participants in the recent Paris Peace Forum also raises concerns. We believe that under the guise of concern for democracy and honest journalism such steps may be used to impose censorship and exert pressure on political dissent. I recall that in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act the participating States made it their aim to "facilitate the freer and wider dissemination of information of all kinds". Tasks of such a comprehensive nature, bordering on interference in the internal affairs of sovereign States, can hardly be discussed in a narrow format.

Under these circumstances, there is a need to confirm or even strengthen existing commitments in this area. For that reason, Russia has submitted a draft decision on the free access of media and society to information for the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in

Milan. This is in fact the other side of freedom of speech, and we invite our colleagues to discuss this draft decision.

We welcome the efforts of the Representative on Freedom of the Media to ensure the safety of journalists. It is our joint task to combat such crimes, and in recent years its relevance has only increased. This also applies to journalists belonging to national minorities. In that connection, we welcome the Italian Chairmanship's idea of preparing a draft decision on this topic for the Ministerial Council meeting in Milan.

A particularly intolerable situation has emerged in Ukraine, where journalists continue to experience all forms of discrimination, including physical violence. The Ukrainian Government is making no effort to rectify this catastrophic state of affairs and continues to construct a totalitarian press system, cleansing the Ukrainian media space of undesirable sources of information. Despite your calls, Mr. Désir, the Ukrainian authorities are building up the criminal proceedings against the head of the RIA Novosti Ukraine news agency Kirill Vyshinsky. The journalist remains in detention. The indifference of the Ukrainian Government's supporters in the United States of America and the European Union, who remain stubbornly silent on the Vyshinsky case and a number of other outrageous cases involving media representatives in Ukraine, is surprising. What is this if not double standards?

The murders of the journalists Anatoly Klyan, Anton Voloshin, Igor Kornelyuk, Andrei Stenin, Andrea Rocchelli, Oles Buzina, Sergei Dolgov, Vyacheslav Veremiy, Pavel Sheremet and many others remain unsolved. With the complicity of the authorities in Ukraine and the United States, the notorious Mirotvorets website continues to operate, and the inclusion of journalists' names on blacklists puts their lives at real risk. Unfortunately, our Western partners remember the Ukrainian Government's unlawful actions and the war it unleashed against dissent often only when they themselves become a target, as was demonstrated by the German Foreign Ministry's reaction recently to the inclusion of the former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder in the Mirotvorets database.

In the opinion of Ukraine's professional journalistic community, the number of unlawful acts against its members is only likely to increase during the forthcoming presidential election campaign in the country. We expect the Representative on Freedom of the Media and other relevant OSCE structures to keep a closer eye on this situation.

The practice of violating the rights of Russian journalists continues as well in countries that class themselves as "bastions of democracy". Reporters are banned without proper authorization from entering certain countries, and there are expulsions, unauthorized detentions, denials of accreditation and so on.

A recent example was the refusal on 20 November to grant accreditation to the Ruptly video news agency at the press conference by the former head of Yukos, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, and the founder of the Hermitage Capital fund, Bill Browder, in London.

At the same time, we noted with satisfaction the news, citing a source in the administration of the French Head of State, that the Élysée Palace was prepared to review the policy of restricting the activities of the Russian media RT France and Sputnik and their accreditation. We trust that this information will be confirmed. We would remind you that

earlier the official representative of the French Government, Benjamin Griveaux, made a discriminatory statement to the effect that these news agencies “are not media outlets but propaganda tools”.

In conclusion, we stress that Russia co-operates in good faith with the Office of the Representative, endeavours to meet all its requests and provides information on subjects of interest to the Representative. We trust that our concerns will also receive a reciprocal response. Our aim is to further strengthen co-operation.

Thank you for your attention.