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**STATEMENT BY
MR. MAXIM BUYAKEVICH, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1431st MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

6 July 2023

On violations of the rights of the media in the OSCE area

Mr. Chairperson,

We are compelled once again to raise the issue of gross and massive infringements of the rights of the media in the OSCE area. The violations are extensive. They include the division of the press into “right” and “wrong”, discrimination against journalists on the basis of nationality and the withdrawal of accreditation from “undesirable” press, among other things.

Let me start with the European Union. As we know, under the guise of combating Russian “propaganda”, the European Union is continuing to shamelessly censor unwelcome points of view and flagrantly violate the right of its citizens to obtain information from alternative sources. Accordingly, having decided that the earlier illegitimate restrictions imposed on Russian media and journalists were not enough, the “Brussels bloc” included five more information resources in the so-called 11th package of anti-Russian sectoral sanctions issued on 23 June: RT Balkan, Oriental Review, Tsargrad, New Eastern Outlook and Katehon. In addition, representatives of the Russian media were again blacklisted for merely performing their professional duties. Included in the list were journalists Mikhail Leontyev and Viktor Sineok, war correspondents Semyon Pegov, Evgeniy Poddubnyy, Alexander Sladkov and Mikhail Zvinchuk and the heads of a number of media outlets – the First Deputy Director General of NTV, Aleksandra Kosterina; the First Deputy Director General of All-Russia Television and Radio Broadcasting Company (VGTRK), Andrey Kondrashov; and VGTRK regional department head, Rifat Sabitov. We consider the measures taken by the European Union to be utterly illegal, politicized and in breach of international obligations in the area of press pluralism, access to information and freedom of the media.

We recall that, in the OSCE Ministerial Council decision adopted in Milan in December 2018, participating States reaffirmed “all relevant OSCE commitments on the right to freedom of expression, freedom of the media, and free flow of information” and “that the right to freedom of expression includes freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers”. The international context cannot and should not be an obstacle to the work of the media.

The fact that the European Union does not really care much about the rights and freedoms of journalists and that its own opportunistic interests are far more important is also evidenced by the work currently under way in the European Union on amendments to the Media Act. For example, on the initiative of France, which is apparently more concerned than anyone else in the European Union about protecting and respecting the rights of reporters, a bill has been drafted that would allow journalists to be spied upon with the help of spy equipment installed on their computers and phones. It is disappointing that this new legislation was recently endorsed by the ambassadors of the EU Member States. Such steps are a flagrant violation of the rights of the professional community. We are compelled once again to draw attention to the Milan OSCE Ministerial Council decision on the safety of journalists, in which it was decided to “refrain from employing unlawful or arbitrary surveillance techniques” as “such acts infringe on the journalists’ enjoyment of human rights, and could put them at potential risk of violence and threats to their safety”.

Moldova is not lagging far behind its Western minders when it comes to censorship of the information space. On 29 May this year, Moldovan President Maia Sandu announced the creation of a national centre for combating propaganda, named “Patriot”. The authorities make no secret of the fact that they are talking about “Russian propaganda”. It is from the “influence” of this “propaganda” that Moldovan citizens are supposed to be “protected”. The centre’s real task is to cleanse the public space of any dissent according to the principle that “everything that is not about European integration is disinformation”. We are clearly witnessing the creation of another tool for suppressing freedom of speech in yet another OSCE participating State.

The systematic squeezing of the Russian information presence in the Baltic States is continuing. The fanatical struggle against pluralism of opinion there has reached the point of absurdity. A striking example of this is the decision of the Radio and Television Commission of Lithuania to block IP addresses from which a number of Russian channels can be watched. It is interesting that Lithuania also included Sputnik among the “main Kremlin propaganda television channels”. We should like to take this opportunity to ask the representatives of Lithuania to tell their competent authorities that the Sputnik news agency does not and has never had a television broadcast. Otherwise, we are tilting at windmills.

Another illustration of the legal arbitrariness in Lithuania is the criminal case against public figure and journalist Algirdas Paleckis. In June of this year, the Supreme Court of Lithuania upheld the decision of the courts of first instance and appeal to imprison him despite the fact that the offence with which he had been charged – “spying for Russia” – had not been proven by the investigation. In order to keep this public figure in custody, Lithuanian prosecutors could think of nothing better than to replace the charge against him with the vague phrase “preparing for espionage”.

The arbitrary blocking of Russian media by United States online platforms continues, their pages are no longer displayed in search results, the reach of the content they post is curtailed, and their materials are not recommended to users for viewing. Since the beginning of the year, nine cases of censorship of Russian media by foreign Internet platforms have already been recorded. Recent examples include the blocking by the social media site YouTube of the channel of the Ura.ru agency because of its videos about referendums in new regions of Russia and of the account of Komsomolskaya Pravda radio. What is this, if not a direct violation of freedom of speech? The audience is being consciously and purposefully deprived of access to diverse information.

We note the continuing inaction, inefficiency and bias of the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and the double standards in the work of Ms. Teresa Ribeiro, who, on the one hand, “expresses concern” about any stories in the Russian media field and, on the other hand, fails to notice the total censorship that has been established in the information space of a number of OSCE participating States. It is hard to believe that the Representative is not aware of, say, the cancellation by the Ukrainian National

Council of Television and Radio Broadcasting of the licences of seven channels: Nash, Maxi TV, 112, NewsOne, ZIK, Ukrlife and Pervy Nezavisimy. Or that she has not heard the criticism expressed by the international professional community and representatives of the European Federation of Journalists regarding the Media Act recently adopted in Ukraine.

Mr. Chairperson,

We have cited today only a few of the most recent cases of media rights violations in the OSCE area. However, the list could go on indefinitely. Admittedly, the official authorities of the aforementioned participating States, as well as of a number of others, are unlikely to stop discriminating against alternative media, persecuting undesirable journalists, restricting the population's access to the full range of information and prohibiting people from expressing their opinions. Because their efforts have turned the information space, which has been torn to shreds by censorship, into a battlefield and journalists into soldiers of the information front. It is a pity that, even by the end of her term, Ms. Ribeiro will probably not be able to stop the politicization of the executive structure she heads, which is experiencing perhaps the most serious crisis in its history.

Thank you for your attention.