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**STATEMENT BY
MR. ANDREY KELIN, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1045th MEETING OF
THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

19 March 2015

**In response to the statements by the European Union and the United States
of America on freedom of expression in the OSCE area**

Mr. Chairperson,

We thank our colleagues for raising this issue. We are heartened that our partners in the European Union finally realize things are not all so smooth in their countries when it comes to freedom of expression.

Access to different sources of information and the possibility of freely expressing one's opinion are without a doubt among the key aspects in the free formation of the individual and the democratic development of society. With this in mind, it is difficult to overestimate the importance of the right to freedom of expression. At the same time, however, other rights and freedoms somehow take second stage.

Discussion is taking place within the OSCE on ways of finding a balance between freedom of expression and the limits to acceptable restrictions in the interests of State, societal and individual security. Extremes are very worrying, and there are indications here and there, including in the European Union, of the persecution of dissidence.

Measures are being taken to exert pressure on media editorial policy, as in the United Kingdom with the establishment of "sanctions lists" for journalists, and to hamper the work of television stations, as in Latvia, Lithuania and Ukraine. In other countries, absolute freedom of expression has produced racist, extremist and even neo-Nazi propaganda and affronts to the honour and dignity of citizens. We witnessed the tragic consequences of these activities recently in Paris. Surely journalists should not only be aware of their right to freely receive and disseminate information but also take responsibility for their words.

It is interesting to note the way our partners frequently juggle with concepts. In the model proposed by them, opposition media, or "critical voices", are always independent, whereas those that support the policy of their country's government are invariably propaganda-mongers. Moreover, it would appear that this opinion is also shared by the OSCE

Representative on Freedom of the Media, who actively urges us to reject State media in principle.

We totally disagree with this approach. Pluralism, which we have frequently heard about in the OSCE from our partners, also implies the existence of a diverse range of opinions. And diversity among media owners can scarcely be a hindrance to this. We realize that our colleagues don't like to hear things that don't fit into their world view. However, unless our Western partners are willing to accept the diversity of opinion that exists, we will not be able to bring ourselves to believe in the sincerity of their so regularly expressed concerns for freedom of expression.

In the meantime, the many examples of the closing down of media, suspending broadcasts by television stations, placing journalists on sanctions lists, and refusing entry to journalists, scientists and political experts taking part in international and academic conferences in many European Union countries create quite a different world view, where there is censorship, where dissidents are persecuted, and where all kinds of methods are used to limit access by the population to information that is not in the interests of the political élite.

It is not the first time that we have heard that freedom of expression and of the media are obstructed in Russia. It is a pity that the detailed information on the situation in this regard in Russia, which we have presented at previous meetings of the Permanent Council, is simply ignored. There are over 86,000 media and more than 300,000 journalists in Russia. Two or three incidents from among their activities are taken as a basis for far-reaching conclusions about suppression of freedom of expression in Russia. As for the situation in the Republic of Crimea, a constituent entity of the Russian Federation, we would just recommend tuning into satellite television and seeing for yourself that the television station ATR is alive and well and that its critical content is the envy of many OSCE countries. And if our partners from the United States have difficulty with the Turkish or Crimean Tatar languages, we are sure that our distinguished Turkish colleagues will be able to help them with the translation.

We have heard our United States colleagues appeal for us to concentrate on systemic problems. We would be glad to extend this appeal to the issue being discussed today.

For example, we would like to hear from the United States representative what the authorities are doing in response to the protest last autumn by journalists in the United States of America to President Barack Obama about media censorship. According to commentators in *The New York Times*, a large number of journalists have been pursued by the White House administration, with information being collected about their telephone calls and credit card transactions and their physical movements being monitored. And what does the Permanent Representative of the United States of America think of the recent revelations by the former national security advisor Condoleezza Rice, in which she described how the United States authorities handles topics publicized in the media that are unacceptable to them? In her words, White House representatives can label a particular publication "too important for national security" and remove it. Or they can "persuade journalists that they have made a mistake." As it would seem, pressure on the press in the United States of America is a common practice that is simply not talked about.

It would be interesting to know the opinion of our United States partners on the established practice in their country of arresting undesirable journalists and the increasingly frequent cases of charging them under the so-called "Russian article", namely "illicit

financing of operations in the United States of America and spying for Russia on the territory of the United States of America”. We are willing to provide examples separately.

The picture of systemic violations is given further colour by the information revealed by the eminent German journalist Udo Ulfkotte concerning the writing of flattering articles about the United States of America in the European press. It would appear that material written by the Central Intelligence Agency and other intelligence services, including the German secret service, is published under the byline of European journalists. Ulfkotte’s book *Bought Journalists* sheds light on the way information and people are manipulated in the interests of United States policy. This is a classic example of the creation of false propaganda that our United States colleague likes so much to go on about.

Such examples of systemic violation of freedom of expression merit the closest attention, and everyone should look first of all to dealing with them on their own doorstep.

Thank you for your attention.