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**STATEMENT BY MR. ANVAR AZIMOV,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

18 March 2010

**Regarding the scandalous broadcast by the
Georgian television company Imedi**

Mr. Chairman,

We should like to draw attention to the timely and, above all, principled response by Ms. Dunja Mijatović, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, to the provocative action by the Georgian television company Imedi, which on 13 March 2010 broadcast a simulated news programme concerning the supposed outbreak of war between Russia and Georgia.

In her special statement (FOM.PR/12/10/Corr.1), Ms. Mijatović rightly underlines that in this case, the issue is not about the content of the broadcast, but about irresponsible journalism and its negative political consequences for media freedom and security in Georgia. We share her assessment that news agencies should not mislead the public by spreading false information. This is fully applicable in Georgia.

In his comments, the Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman underscores that: “The provocative newscast has inflicted quite specific harm upon security and stability in the region, greatly increasing the degree of tension in an already complicated situation.” We expect that the European observers working in Georgia, as well as the entire international community, will give a principled assessment of this.

And such a response is already on hand. In particular, Mr. John Bass, the United States ambassador in Georgia, characterized the Imedi newscast in negative terms, calling it “completely irresponsible” and “not in keeping with standards of professional journalism”, and saying that it calls into question the “culture of democracy” in the country in which he resides.

The French Foreign Ministry made a similar statement, as did Mr. Denis Keefe, the United Kingdom ambassador in Tbilisi, who involuntarily became one of the characters in the imagined scenario.

The European Union (EU) Monitoring Mission in Georgia was compelled to issue a special statement. The document emphasizes in particular that “this type of irresponsible programming has the potential to seriously destabilize the situation close to the boundary lines.” It should be noted that the EU monitors have witnessed the increased concern of the local population for their security.

Needless to say, the Imedi action was irresponsible and unethical, first and foremost, with respect to Georgian society where, as was only to be expected, it caused panic. The wave of indignation that swept the country is understandable. The Georgian National Communications Commission, Catholicos-Patriarch Iliya II, opposition figures, human rights defenders as well as countless people who came to protest outside the television company’s building expressed their condemnation. There is a widespread view in Georgia that the Imedi channel’s act of provocation could not have been prepared without the authorities’ approval.

Indeed, the President of Georgia is not hiding his approving attitude towards the scandalous programme, a scenario which he referred to as “maximally close to reality”.

Addressing the Permanent Council two weeks ago, we called attention to the report that was prepared by Ms. Dunja Mijatović’s predecessor, Mr. Miklós Haraszti, hot on the heels of the tragedy that occurred in Kosovo in 2004, when the broadcasting of unscrupulous reports resulted in massive unrest and loss of human life. The aforementioned report noted that the media, specifically the broadcasting sector, displayed unacceptable levels of emotion, bias, carelessness and falsely applied “patriotic” zeal.

Unfortunately, the provocative action undertaken by the Georgian television company Imedi is not the only example of this kind of irresponsibility that we have encountered. As you will recall, in December 2006 the French-speaking State television channel in Belgium RTBF announced live on air the supposed “sensational” news of the country’s break-up. The public were alarmed, and the editorial office received a barrage of telephone calls from concerned citizens. The television channel’s overburdened website crashed. And this was in spite of the fact that unlike the Georgian farce, in Belgium throughout the broadcast an onscreen “crawl” informed people that this was a hoax. Unfortunately, the then OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Mr. Miklós Haraszti, for some reason did not pay any attention to this incident. If he had responded in a timely manner, perhaps today we would not have to urge Georgian journalists, and those who are spurring them on, not to play with matches.

We trust that the heads of all the other OSCE institutions will promptly and objectively evaluate the events taking place in Georgia in accordance with the mandates issued to them by the decision-making bodies.

Thank you for your attention.