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**STATEMENT BY  
MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE  
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1374th MEETING OF THE  
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

19 May 2022

**In response to the report by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media**

Ms. Ribeiro,

We have carefully studied the report presented on your activities over the past six months.

We are obliged to note with regret that it is becoming increasingly obvious that the institution of OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media is going through a profound crisis. Over the past few months, prejudice and partisanship have become the calling card of your Office. We would remind you once again that you do not have the right to use non-consensus terms in your publications. For the head of an OSCE executive structure that is accountable to the participating States it is unacceptable to use such expressions as “aggressive attack” and “Russian invasion of Ukraine”. We are also of the view that the Representative on Freedom of the Media should not be wasting energy and time on the replication of political clichés. It is better to channel one’s enthusiasm into the implementation of tasks provided for by one’s mandate.

We are deeply disappointed by your Office’s biased position regarding the developments in Ukraine in the context of the special military operation being conducted by Russia since 24 February. Its one-sided, politicized press releases are drafted in line with the narratives of the European Commission. We would remind you that our Organization is comprised not only of European Union countries and that it is, therefore, categorically unacceptable for your publications to refer to resolutions or other documents of the European Parliament and to cite statements by the leadership of the European Commission in relation to Russia. In accordance with terms of reference that were approved by consensus, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, in the performance of his or her duty, “will be guided by his or her independent and objective assessment regarding the specific paragraphs composing this mandate”.

We should like to share our outlook on what is happening in the realm of freedom of speech and the media in the OSCE area, and also our detailed assessments of the Media Representative’s activities in this regard.

Two weeks ago, when talking about World Press Freedom Day within these very walls, we spoke in detail of the unprecedented pressure to which information sources expressing views that differ from the

Western mainstream are currently being subjected. Unfortunately, the persecution they are suffering increases with every day. Reporters are threatened and stripped of their accreditation; their bank accounts are blocked; it is made as difficult as possible for them to go about their professional activities. The tactic of State terror is being employed against some of them. This includes the detention in Estonia of Elena Chernysheva, the head of the Sputnik Media information portal, under an absurd pretext. Or the order issued by the Westminster Magistrates' Court in London to extradite Julian Assange, the founder of the WikiLeaks organization, to the United States of America. By the way, a most convenient timing was chosen for the latter – it was done on the quiet, with the attention of the international community diverted towards the events in Ukraine.

An example of unprecedented pressure being exerted on journalists is the situation that has unfolded in Portugal with regard to the Brazilian staff of Sputnik Brazil. For two months now, they have not been receiving their salaries, which were frozen by the Portuguese banks ActivoBank and novobanco. Moreover, as pointed out by Lauro Neto, a journalist working for that media resource, 160 of his reports have been censored by Portugal and the European Union over the past two and a half months, even though not a single one of them dealt with Russia or Ukraine.

There are a great many such examples. We are surprised that you have not deigned to direct your attention to these and many other instances of violations of media freedom in OSCE participating States. At the same time, we observe a heightened interest in the media situation in Russia.

We categorically reject the criticisms levelled against us as groundless and one-sided. We believe that when assessing the information landscape in Russia, mention must be made of the fact that a large-scale information war has been unleashed against our country. A single phrase in your report noting that the ban on RT and Sputnik cannot be a proportional response to disinformation clearly does not do justice to the scope of the restrictions imposed on Russian media.

Additionally, to be precise, it is not simply two “State media” that have fallen under the European Union’s ban, as your report suggests, but a number of heads of media outlets. In the United States the main Russian television channels have been affected as well. We already spoke about this in detail at the meeting of the Permanent Council two weeks ago. Two war correspondents were “honoured” with individual sanctions. And yet in the report presented, you as the Representative on Freedom of the Media stress “how important it is to receive ... information from ... media workers on the ground”. We must state outright that for the head of an OSCE executive structure to interpret his or her mandate in such a one-sided manner is unacceptable.

The concern expressed in that document over the people in Russia who, in your view, have been “completely deprived” of their right “to seek and receive information” is puzzling. Things are not at all as you say. The so-called “assessments” of the situation in our country provided there once again confirm that it is essential for your Office’s staff to establish contact with Russian media outlets from across the entire spectrum. By following such an approach it would have been possible to avoid gross factual blunders of that kind. In reality, a large number of media resources are operating in Russia, including 242 correspondent offices of foreign media outlets from 54 different countries. They include the BBC, ABC, the Associated Press, Washington Press, Euronews, TF1 and many others. Their content is fully accessible to the Russian public both offline and online. At the same time, the broadcasting of pretty much all Russian media outlets has been blocked in Europe – indeed, the dissemination of their content is punishable by administrative penalties in some OSCE participating States. The next step is criminal liability. I would remind you in this regard that we have yet to receive a reply from the representative of the European Union to a question that we put to her directly in this room – namely, what is one to make of the fact that the people of Europe have

been cut off from all sources of information that deviate from the political dictums of the European Union “bloc”?

The report also fails to mention the catastrophic situation regarding press freedom in Ukraine. And yet we have repeatedly drawn your attention, Ms. Ribeiro, to the fact that the Ukrainian Government has blocked around 500 Internet resources (including Yandex, Yandex-Ukraine, Mail.ru, VKontakte, Odnoklassniki and Kaspersky Lab) and virtually all Russian-owned media without exception (Channel One, NTV, VGTRK, the Rossiya Segodnya news agency, the television channel Spas and others). You are also aware of the situation with regard to the censoring of Russian-owned and Russian-language sources of information in the Baltic countries. In Latvia, for example, even Russian-language entertainment television channels that broadcast serials and chat shows have been shut down. A similar situation as regards segregation of the information space can be observed in the Republic of Moldova as well. Moreover, these instances of persecution of the media in the aforementioned States began long before the start of the Russian military operation in Ukraine. Not only was none of this found worthy of being mentioned in your report: nothing was even posted on Twitter. We maintain that these are double standards.

Madam Representative,

All journalists killed while exercising their professional duties are mourned in Russia. They include those who lost their lives in Ukraine as a result of the political terror unleashed against dissidents over the past eight years. We agree with the point made that all crimes should be investigated. It is unacceptable that the cause of death should remain a mystery in the cases of Anatoly Klyan, Anton Voloshin, Igor Kornelyuk, Andrei Stenin, Andrea Rocchelli, Oles Buzina, Sergei Dolgov, Vyacheslav Veremiy and many others. We are disappointed that no room could be found in the report for this problem. And for much else besides, such as the fate of the well-known US film director and blogger Gonzalo Lira, who has gone missing in Ukraine, or the deportation of the Dutch journalist Robert Dulmers and the Spanish reporter Rubén Gisbert from Ukraine by the Ukrainian intelligence services. Nor was room found for a message of support for the Russian journalists injured in the conflict zone, that is, for Irina Kuksenkova from Channel One, Rodion Severyanov from the Izvestia media group, and journalists from the Rossiya Segodnya news agency and the Zvezda television channel. On the other hand, the situation regarding the safety of journalists in Russia is diagnosed in the report as “lamentable”. What makes it so?

I should also like to put a direct question to you: what criteria is your Office guided by in deciding whether it is appropriate to issue a public reaction to a given incident in the field of media freedom and pluralism of opinions? From a tweet by the Media Representative we learned, for example, that the Azerbaijani journalist Ayten Mammadova had been threatened. Yet, the recent attempted terrorist attack against journalists from the Rossiya Segodnya news agency living in Berlin and members of their families predictably did not elicit any reaction whatsoever on your part. Or are threats against Russian journalists somehow different?

I must point out that we were puzzled by the reference in your report to some sort of “direct contacts” with the Russian authorities. You have no such contacts. That, incidentally, distinguishes the current Media Representative from her predecessors, not least Mr. Harlem Désir, who, in spite of the serious differences of opinion between him and ourselves, was in constant dialogue with representatives of Russia and who also initiated, in 2019, the first major OSCE conference on media freedom in our country. This practice was discontinued when he left his post.

There has been some talk here today about how this year marks the 25th anniversary of the executive structure in question. At present, the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media is essentially but a minor branch of the East Strategic Communications Task Force of the European Union,

which is allegedly combating supposed Russian disinformation. In her statement just now, Ms. Teresa Ribeiro took the liberty of defining “propaganda”, thereby justifying a decision on the imposition of censorship that runs counter to OSCE principles. She also devoted practically half of her opening remarks to anti-Russian political rhetoric. Twenty-five years since its foundation, this OSCE executive structure has hit rock bottom. It cannot and it will not carry on like this in the medium term.

Thank you for your attention.