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**STATEMENT BY
MR. ANDREY KELIN, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1062nd MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

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On freedom of expression and pluralism of the media in the OSCE area

Mr. Chairperson,

Despite resounding declarations by our Western partners about the “sanctity” of freedom of speech, the real value of this concept in the OSCE is, sadly, steadily declining. The OSCE area has been gripped by the “fever” of the information war. Moreover, it is typical that arrant propaganda has been unleashed against Russia and the Russian media under the guise of combating so-called “State propaganda”.

Attention is being drawn to the topic of the unacceptability of State propaganda due to the efforts of our Western colleagues and with the support of the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. And yet this label is being applied to information solely on the basis that it comes from Russian media, while completely ignoring the possibility that facts documented by journalists on the ground, sometimes at the cost of their lives, could actually be accurate. Yet there is no reaction to the blatant anti-Russian hysteria and the flood of lies being spread in Western and Ukrainian media.

The report by the European Economic and Social Committee “How media is used to influence social and political processes in the EU and neighbouring countries” is just as curious. The facts, conclusions and proposed steps it contains with regard to combating so-called Russian content and Russian State propaganda testify eloquently to the European Union’s policy of countering the Russian information presence in Europe.

The round table “The media in a time of (dis)information: a United States–German discussion of media strategies towards Russia” is along similar lines. During the meeting there was a discussion of joint efforts by the United States, Germany and their allies to counter the “Russian information war” allegedly unleashed by Moscow against the West in the context of the conflict in Ukraine in order to target a Russian-speaking audience in Central and Eastern Europe, primarily in the Baltic States.

One wonders what has happened to the calls for pluralism of the media and for ensuring access by the people to diverse sources of information. Or do our colleagues have such little faith in the capacity of citizens to independently evaluate information and to resist the so-called “information war”?

There is another important aspect – the obstruction of the lawful activity of journalists in the OSCE area. This shameful practice is being widely used not only by the usual “leaders” in this area, the Baltic States and Ukraine, but is also increasingly taking root in other OSCE participating States.

One need only recall the bans on entering Moldova imposed on a film crew for the programme “Postskriptum” produced by the Russian station TV Tsentr, the head of the Rossiya Segodnya international news agency Dmitry Kiselev and Rossiya Segodnya correspondent Armen Gasparyan, the All-Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company journalist Alexander Balitsky and the film crew of St. Petersburg Channel 5, V. Voronin and A. Perfiliev.

The United Kingdom also distinguished itself recently. Barclays Bank froze Rossiya Segodnya’s bank account on the pretext that its director general Dmitry Kiselev had been added to the European Union’s “sanctions lists”. This is yet another attempt to exert pressure on an undesirable source of information which has long been labelled the mouthpiece of the Kremlin.

Particular attention is being drawn to the inadmissibility of the existence of State-run media. Yet once again this is aimed at Russia, and at a time when, for example, a reform is brewing in the depths of the United States Congress, a merger of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia and the Middle East Broadcasting Networks into a single body that will harmonize its general policy with the planned federal international news agency and the United States Department of State.

Amendments to the Lithuanian law on provision of information to the public provide for sanctions on broadcasters and rebroadcasters “for war propaganda, calling for change to the constitutional order and threatening State priorities”. The Radio and Television Commission of Lithuania stopped the broadcasting of the Russian television channel RTR-Planeta. It is notable, however, that for some reason no one was concerned about the broad interpretation and the fuzziness of the wording of the Lithuanian law in a persistent attempt to incriminate Russia.

Under a spurious pretext, the National Broadcasting Council of Poland initiated a procedure to withdraw the licence of Radio Hobby, which broadcast programmes of the Russian radio station Radio Sputnik.

Yet the European Union countries criticize Russia for taking counter-measures to defend its own statehood, including the law on undesirable organizations and foreign agents.

We call on the participating States to refrain from politicizing critical issues and to return to the practice of constructive dialogue and a search for joint solutions.

Our Western colleagues have frequently proposed a draft decision on freedom of expression to the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting. There have been several attempts to

adopt a decision on the safety of journalists. This year a draft declaration on human rights and freedoms in the digital age has been proposed on behalf of the Chairmanship. While we have nothing against the topics themselves, we have repeatedly called on our partners to look at the issue in a balanced and comprehensive way, including the issues of responsibility and the importance of putting an end to double standards. However, we have met with active resistance under different pretexts on every occasion.

We regard this path as a dead end. We believe the time has come to examine the issue of freedom of expression and freedom and pluralism of the media in the OSCE area in a broader context, taking today's realities and threats into account. In this context, the Russian delegation has prepared and distributed a draft decision along these lines for the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in Belgrade. We call on our partners to study it attentively, and on the Serbian Chairmanship – after the summer holidays – to organize its discussion. We hope the document will be a good basis for achieving consensus.

Thank you for your attention.