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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
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AT THE 1184th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

3 May 2018

On World Press Freedom Day

Mr. Chairperson,

Today we are celebrating a significant date – the 25th anniversary of World Press Freedom Day, which was established in 1993 by a United Nations General Assembly resolution.

It could hardly be disputed that independent and pluralistic media are one of the most important elements of the democratic development of society. However, we have repeatedly said that being a journalist is both a privilege and a great responsibility.

Media workers often have access to a wide range of information, including of a very sensitive nature. They reach a wide audience and can directly influence public opinion. That is why it is so important to be able to handle the information received, to bring it to the audience, without distorting the subject matter.

Our position has not changed – freedom of the press does not mean freedom from responsibility. It is the task of the OSCE participating States to create an environment in which freedom of expression and respect for the rights, honour and dignity of every human being can be ensured in equal measure. This is especially important in the light of the readiness of a number of countries to equate a professional journalist with anyone who is able to use modern means of communication and has access to the Internet.

Recently, not only the public, but also journalists themselves are increasingly thinking about the prospects of their profession. And it is not by accident. Today, throughout the world, the press is subjected to censorship, pressure and fines; publishers are temporarily or completely shut down. Media workers are often victims of harassment, threats, attacks, detentions and even murder. Many publications and television or radio channels have to face serious obstacles in their work, including because of their belonging to a particular State. One need only recall, for example, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, France, Ukraine, Moldova, Latvia, Lithuania or Estonia, where Russian news agencies and TV channels are under constant pressure.

The use of mass media for propaganda and the dissemination of fake news is gaining momentum. It is increasingly difficult to understand information flows, where truth is often mixed up with fiction. There are those who benefit from it. In some countries that loudly assert the independence of their media, we are seeing a merger of the interests of the largest media corporations and the political establishment. As a result, the mass media serve the interests of ruling coalitions, which can be very different – from eliminating political opponents in the country to solving geopolitical problems.

All sorts of methods are used. Take, for example, the idea originating in France of approving certain “criteria” almost at the legislative level, according to which it will be possible to divide information into “credible” and “not credible”. No less remarkable is the initiative supported by many Western countries of Reporters Without Borders, the Global Editors Network, the European Broadcasting Union and the Agence France-Presse news agency for the creation of some sort of “media white list”, which will be “recommended” to national regulators. Right before our eyes there are attempts to alter the media space to fit an arbitrary mould in order to rid it of unwanted opinions.

Moreover, in many OSCE countries, the media neglect professional standards and, much like politicians, try to serve as a substitute for the justice system, churning out clichés, reproducing categorical statements and accusations, and issuing “sentences” to individuals or entire States. This state of affairs is unacceptable in a democratic society.

This is one of the key challenges of our time. Western countries are pursuing a policy aimed at undermining the core of the key democratic principles that they once defended. First and foremost, we are talking about freedom of expression and freedom of the media. They consciously manipulate concepts and give rise to propagandist hysteria so that, under the pretext of fighting it, they can suppress inconvenient points of view.

We call on the OSCE participating States to abandon the double standards in their approaches to ensuring freedom of expression and the media. This is in our common interest.

Thank you for your attention.