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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE
1310th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL
VIA VIDEO TELECONFERENCE**

22 April 2021

Repression of the media in Latvia

Mr. Chairperson,

The repressive policy of the Latvian authorities towards Russian and Russian-language media is once again on the agenda of today's Permanent Council meeting. We are compelled to note that the situation as regards freedom of the media in Latvia continues to deteriorate rapidly, and that generally accepted democratic principles and rights are being grossly and systematically violated.

Let us move on to the specifics. On 14 April, the Latvian State Security Service summoned for questioning five journalists working with Russian-owned Sputnik Latvia and the Baltnews Russian-language news agency. They were made to sign a pledge of non-disclosure and a pledge not to leave the country. According to our information, these media representatives have been accorded the status of "suspects" under Article 84 of the Criminal Law of the Republic of Latvia (on "violation of sanctions imposed by international organizations") in view of their co-operation with the Rossiya Segodnya news agency. The article in question provides for up to four years' imprisonment as punishment.

It is obvious that the Security Service's actions against the Russian-speaking reporters have an altogether clear purpose, namely intimidation and the creation of an absolutely "toxic" environment for local journalists' interactions with Russian media outlets. In that connection, we would remind the Latvian representatives that the participating States agreed in the 2018 Milan OSCE Ministerial Council decision on the safety of journalists that "the use of undue restrictive measures against journalists can affect their safety, and prevents them from providing information to the public, and thus negatively affects the exercise of the right to freedom of expression."

Unfortunately, this is not the first instance of such unlawful treatment of media workers in Latvia. In December 2020, criminal proceedings were instituted under the same article against seven freelance correspondents from the same media outlets. Their homes were searched, their office equipment scrutinized, and their telephones and bank cards seized. Correspondents working with other Russian media – NTV, Russia Today and others – have also indicated that they have encountered problems with the maintenance of their Latvian bank accounts.

We once again call on the Latvian Government to abandon its repressive tactics vis-à-vis the media and to stop covering up such an approach by invoking unlawful European Union sanctions.

Let me now turn to a new method in the battle against alternative, predominantly Russian-language sources of information. On 31 March, the National Electronic Mass Media Council of Latvia launched a campaign to eradicate dissent on the Internet and blocked the Latvian people's access to the websites of the Russia Today and NTV television channels and to the rus24.tv and teledays.net servers broadcasting Russian television. The only justification that the Latvian Government could come up with was that these sites "may violate copyright laws, have a negative impact and be directed against Latvia and its citizens". We draw attention to the word "may". The Latvian authorities' legal culture has evidently degenerated to such an extent that they are now making accusations about the commission of potential, that is, imaginary actions rather than concrete ones. In view of this situation, how can one talk of rule of law – this question is in fact for the European Union, of which Latvia is a member – when this very right is being cynically and deliberately flouted? It is the same with freedom of speech, media pluralism and the right of everyone, including Latvian citizens, to access to information.

Given these circumstances, it is regrettable that there has been no meaningful response from the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media to the blatant violations by the Latvian Government of OSCE commitments both on the safety of journalists and on access to information. We would remind the distinguished Ms. Teresa Ribeiro of the fact that the function of observing the media situation in all participating States is clearly stipulated in her mandate.

We are also surprised by the Swedish Chairmanship. During Foreign Minister Ann Linde's visit to Moscow on 2 February, Russian journalists personally handed her a message asking that attention finally be paid to the persecution of Russian and Russian-language media in Latvia. It took the Chairperson-in-Office two whole months to respond. With that speed of response, dear colleagues, we shall not get very far.

Thank you for your attention.