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Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY
MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1344th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

11 November 2021

On violations of the rights of journalists in Estonia

Madam Chairperson,

Unfortunately, Estonia has gained lamentable experience in restricting the rights of journalists. Let us recall the most abhorrent such case. On 1 January 2020, as a result of pressure from the authorities, the Tallinn office of the Sputnik news agency ceased its operations. Its local staff had received letters from the Estonian police threatening them with criminal prosecution for their co-operation with the Rossiya Segodnya news agency. Sputnik Media, an Internet resource established in February of this year, has found itself in the cross hairs of the Estonian Government's discriminatory campaign. Although the core of its journalistic team is made up of former employees of the Sputnik Estonia editorial office, the new media outlet has no contractual relations with the Rossiya Segodnya media holding company. It is financed exclusively by independent sources.

So what is the issue here? Let us explain. At the end of October, the Estonian bank TBB informed Elena Chernysheva, editor-in-chief of the aforementioned Sputnik Media portal, about the closure of the accounts of the non-profit organizations that had been financing the media resource. The decision was based on some vague suspicions about money laundering and the financing of terrorism. Naturally, no evidence was provided. A similar decision had been taken earlier by another Estonian bank, LHV. There is no doubt that the Estonian financial institutions were given clear instructions to stop servicing these organizations' accounts.

Yet another form of pressure on Sputnik Media was the decision taken at the end of October by Facebook moderators to shut down the media outlet's account once more, already for the second time, and again without giving any reasons. The management of this information resource are also coming under serious pressure. For example, when crossing the Russian-Estonian border, they are subjected to lengthy "interviews" and the contents of their luggage are meticulously inspected.

Behind all these steps we can see manifest efforts on the part of the Estonian authorities to neutralize the so-called "information threat". And no wonder: Sputnik Media is gaining popularity among the Russian-speaking population; its audience is growing and plans are afoot for it to enter the Estonian-language information space.

This is yet another grave violation by Estonia of freedom of speech and the media. We consider the current situation to be unacceptable. We demand that the Estonian Government immediately stop violating its international commitments on ensuring the unhindered work of the press, freedom of expression and media pluralism.

We call on the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Teresa Ribeiro, to look into what is happening, and to persevere in getting the Estonian authorities to revise their discriminatory policy towards alternative sources of information.

Thank you for your attention.