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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE
1313th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL
VIA VIDEO TELECONFERENCE**

13 May 2021

**In response to the report by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media,
Ms. Teresa Ribeiro**

Ms. Ribeiro,

We thank you for your first report to the Permanent Council.

We note the continuity in the activities of the Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media regarding the protection of the rights of journalists, ensuring safe working conditions for them, promoting media pluralism and the right to freedom of expression, and combating disinformation. We support your efforts in these areas. In particular, we read with interest your communiqué of 3 May, in which, referring to the relevant commitments by OSCE participating States, you argue that they should ensure the rights of the media to report, collect and disseminate information, news and opinion freely, regardless of frontiers.

At the same time, we are very surprised that the report itself does not address an issue as topical and urgent as the politicized censorship of the global network space. We understand that propaganda in favour of war, violence, intolerance and discrimination in its various forms, including racism, neo-Nazism and chauvinism, should be unconditionally banned. But it is very dangerous to ignore politically motivated restrictive activities by Internet platforms, including blocking, removing and artificially lowering search engine rankings. This is all the more the case since all these actions, as we have repeatedly stressed, are not carried out in accordance with national or international law, but with the use of completely non-transparent tools invented by the Internet monopolists themselves in the interests of certain political groups or States. Their actions strike not only at the rights and interests of individuals and publications, but also at the system of democratic values and the international information architecture as a whole.

In this way, the unlawful censorship of the World Wide Web narrows the scope for free expression. Any media, civil society representatives and even legally elected Heads of State can be forcibly disconnected from the global airwaves at any time. Examples of such unlawful actions abound, but the reverse is unfortunately very rare. The illegal monopolization of the Internet provides ample opportunities for spreading disinformation and manipulating public opinion. This, in turn, reinforces mistrust of the media and communication, and calls into question professional journalism as a whole. Finally, we should not forget the poor protection of personal data collected by social media on a massive scale.

In that regard, open and constructive dialogue with all stakeholders to develop clear requirements for the operation of companies of this kind would be very useful.

Safeguarding freedom of expression and access to information is still a highly relevant task. As the state of affairs in this area continues to deteriorate, we regret that the participating States were unable to reach consensus on a draft OSCE Ministerial Council decision in Tirana. The situation is worst in Ukraine, the United States of America, France, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, where not only members of the professional journalistic community but also ordinary citizens are subjected to information discrimination. We spoke about this issue in detail here on 29 April on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day. The Representative on Freedom of the Media needs to pay particular attention to it in order to end violations of obligations to provide access to information, as well as to correct the geographical imbalance in the work of this OSCE executive structure.

We welcome your attention, Ms. Ribeiro, to the safety of journalists. Countering such phenomena is our shared priority. We agree with you on the need to press participating States to implement the important decision adopted at the Milan Ministerial Council in 2018 on the safety of journalists. In that context, we should particularly like to highlight the persecution of Russian and Russian-language media in a number of OSCE countries. In spite of the loud proclamations by some Western colleagues about respecting journalists' rights, reporters are unjustifiably accused of "propaganda", hounded, put under financial pressure, censored, deprived of accreditation, expelled and refused entry. This situation is once again particularly dire in Ukraine, France, Germany, Poland, the United Kingdom, the United States, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia.

We fully support your intention, Ms. Ribeiro, to give top priority to combating misinformation. In the digital age, this aspect is more urgent than ever. We are forced to note that some authoritative media outlets are allowing, or perhaps intentionally promoting, knowingly false or inaccurate publications. The reasons are often trivial – intense rivalry as a pretext for lowering the professional bar, attempts to curry political favour, or both. With the pandemic and the associated economic downturn, such irresponsible behaviour is fraught with negative consequences for human life and health. It deprives people of any hope of improving the quality of the social and cultural spheres, which have deteriorated significantly in the face of COVID-19.

In that context, we expect the Representative's Office to hold more events directly for the journalistic community to improve the quality of journalism, including through the development of ethical standards and press self-regulation mechanisms. This is important not only to ensure a responsible attitude on the part of reporters to their work, but also to combat the spread of fake news and incitement to hatred.

In addition, we look forward to more active participation by the Representative in the work of the OSCE-Council of Europe Co-ordination Group, including on the topic of national minorities. We believe that this interaction would be useful for both organizations. The corresponding activities should be reflected in your regular reports.

We agree with you that there are problems with freedom of expression and the media in practically the entire OSCE area. Our country, too, has such problems. However, we should like to encourage the Representative and her team to consult a full range of sources, including official ones, when considering the media situation in a given State. Chasing after "scoops" should not be an end in itself.

Moreover, it is crucial to follow the letter of the mandate, namely to make assessments on an equal and impartial basis, avoiding double standards with regard to States east of Vienna. I shall cite one example.

Ms. Ribeiro, on several occasions we have seen publications by you with concerns about the alleged ill-treatment of journalists by police during protests in Russia or Belarus. At the same time, it is surprising that the police violence going on in the United States is not given due public attention by you. For example, US Press Freedom Tracker, a well-known US non-governmental organization, reported that 17 media workers were ill-treated and 15 journalists detained during a single day of rallies in Brooklyn Center, Minnesota, on 16 April. I recall that the protests were linked to the killing of the young African American Daunte Wright by police officers on 11 April. Among the victims were CNN producer Carolyn Sung, who was thrown to the ground and arrested, a photojournalist publishing under the pseudonym PJ, who was shot repeatedly with rubber bullets, another photojournalist, Tim Evans, who was sprayed with tear gas, and a CNN camera crew, which was pelted with water bottles and forced to leave the scene of the protests. For some reason there is no mention of this in either the press releases or the Representative's Twitter account. And if there are no "concerns", there is no reflection of them in the report, which may raise doubts about how balanced the document actually is.

By way of conclusion, we should like to stress that Russia is co-operating in good faith with the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media on a wide range of inquiries. We are willing to further develop our constructive co-operation. We wish Ms. Ribeiro and her team robust health and success.

Thank you for your attention.