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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1248th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

21 November 2019

**In response to the report by Mr. Harlem Désir, OSCE Representative on
Freedom of the Media**

Mr. Chairperson,
Mr. Désir,

We have noted your report with interest. Some topics in it, in our opinion, go beyond the scope of the mandate of the Representative, as they concern people who have nothing to do with journalism. At the same time, we fully support your efforts to promote media freedom and pluralism, to ensure safe working conditions for reporters and to combat disinformation in the OSCE area. We are also willing to provide you with every assistance in this regard.

We note an increase in the number of cases in some OSCE participating States of gross violation of commitments to ensure freedom of the press and equal access to information and of intolerance of alternative views.

One example of the selective attitude was the media conference in London in July this year, when the British authorities refused to accredit correspondents from the television station Russia Today and the Sputnik news agency. We regret that this incident is not mentioned in your report. Such events seek to erode non-discriminatory standards of media freedom, to divide the press into “trustworthy” and “untrustworthy” and, to put it bluntly, to introduce political censorship and eliminate competitors in the media market through unfair competition in the guise of combating disinformation, fake news and propaganda.

Unofficial projects such as the Journalism Trust Initiative, the Paris Call for Trust and Security in Cyberspace and the International Declaration on Information and Democracy are also used to fragment the global information field. We consider the promotion of such non-inclusive and non-transparent initiatives to regulate the Internet and the media at the international level to be unacceptable and extremely dangerous. A number of international platforms, such as the United Nations, UNESCO, the Council of Europe and, of course, the OSCE work successfully today to discuss and elaborate joint measures for the benefit of the professional journalistic community.

In this context, we believe there is a need to reaffirm or even strengthen existing commitments in the area of access to information. This is the very purpose of the draft decision by Russia for the Ministerial

Council meeting in Bratislava on free access of the public to information. We invite colleagues to discuss and work together on this, all the more so since we demonstrated at last year's Ministerial Council meeting in Milan that, in spite of differences, participating States are capable of adopting unifying political decisions.

We welcome your efforts, Mr. Désir, to combat the spread of disinformation and fake news. We believe that dialogue among professional journalistic communities on this subject on the OSCE platform would be extremely useful.

The situation in Ukraine remains extremely worrying. The recent change in the country's leadership, unfortunately, has not helped to improve the situation of media resources there. Like you, we are also concerned at the attacks by the authorities on the television stations 112 Ukraine, NewsOne and ZIK, whose reporting offers alternative points of view to the official one. In the view of Ukraine's journalistic community, State control of the media and censorship of the press could well increase in the near future. We expect you and the other OSCE human rights bodies to pay greater attention to this situation.

The physical safety of reporters in Ukraine is not guaranteed. There has still been no progress in solving the murders of Anatoly Klyan, Anton Voloshin, Igor Kornelyuk, Andrey Stenin, Andrea Rocchelli, Oles Buzina, Sergey Dolgov, Vyacheslav Veremiy, Pavel Sheremet, and also Vadim Komarov, who was murdered this year. Nor has there been any progress in the investigation into the firing of a grenade at the building of the 112 Ukraine television station. The Ukrainian armed forces continue to shell journalists in the east of the country. The notorious Mirotvorets website, which has moved to the United States of America, continues to put the lives of press workers at risk by revealing their personal data.

According to Serhiy Tomilenko, head of Ukraine's National Union of Journalists, attacks on the press continue unabated. "Every five days, a journalist is beaten or aggressively attacked," he has said. Some 92 per cent of these crimes remain uninvestigated or unpunished. Only one in 12 cases comes to trial and the punishment frequently comes down to a symbolic fine. As a result, correspondents are afraid to publish "sensitive" articles that could displease the people figuring in them and provoke aggression on their part. His words were confirmed by Oksana Romanyuk, director of the Institute of Mass Information, who stated that 208 cases of attacks on journalists and obstruction of work of the media have been recorded in Ukraine in 2019. Matilda Bogner, head of the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, has also drawn attention to the threat to the physical safety of journalists working in the country and the absence of an appropriate reaction by the law enforcement authorities. And Matthew Schaaf, director of the Ukrainian office of the organization Freedom House, pointed out that Ukraine "restricts freedom of the speech and exerts political pressure on the media".

One recent example is the opening of criminal proceedings in two cases for "infringement of the territorial integrity of Ukraine" against the Russian television presenter Vladimir Solovyov, and the abuse and threats directed against him by the Ukrainian member of parliament Oleksiy Honcharenko. Such actions set a dangerous precedent for radicals and extremists. They can only be interpreted as an assault on the life and safety of the journalist and members of his family. We urge you, Mr. Désir, to respond to this flagrant case.

In general, we believe that journalists in Russia and Ukraine should be able to conduct a professional dialogue without regard to the political situation. We would welcome the resumption of such dialogue under the auspices of your Office.

Serious problems are being observed in other OSCE States, including countries that regard themselves as being "strongholds of democracy". Reporters there are subject to illegal entry bans, expulsion, unauthorized detention, denial of accreditation, and so on.

In particular, France continues to pursue a policy of media segregation based on editorial policy and nationality. The most recent World Forum, dealing with questions of democracy, information and digital freedom, took place in Paris from 11 to 13 November. In the best “democratic traditions”, the television station RT France was not allowed to cover this event under another far-fetched pretext.

The European Union continues to follow doctrinaire lines in purging its information space of Russian media resources under the pretext of combating disinformation. The authorities in Brussels approve various documents, such as the Code of Practice on Disinformation and the self-assessment of online platforms, etc., creating a policy framework for “witch-hunting” within the media. At the same time, they are increasing the financing of structures effectively specializing in combating alternative points of view in the media, such as the East StratCom Task Force within the European External Action Service. Moreover, the European Union itself is actively engaged in propaganda, planning, in particular, to fund a Russian-language television channel designed to convey EU values to Russian-speaking audiences.

We have drawn attention to the reports recently published by the European Commission of the largest telecommunications companies (Facebook, Google, Microsoft, Mozilla, Twitter and seven other European brands) on the fight against disinformation according to the precepts of the authorities in Brussels. There were no sensations: over the past year, neither commercial operators nor European officials have been able to find and present concrete evidence of the spread of disinformation by Russia. There is no doubt, however, that the search for “misdeeds” will continue.

It was announced yesterday that the Latvian National Electronic Media Council has decided to suspend broadcasting by nine Russian television channels in the country, including Petersburg – Channel 5. We regard this step as another attack on freedom of speech and the media.

We are concerned about the media freedom situation in the United States of America. It was announced that Max Blumenthal, editor of the news site The Grayzone, was arrested in his own home in Washington on 25 October on a charge of attacking a representative of the Venezuelan opposition forces. According to the journalist himself, this was connected with his reports on the activities of Venezuelan oppositionists in the United States.

The case of the Australian journalist and publicist Julian Assange, who is known to face extradition to the United States, where he may receive up to 175 years in prison, continues to cause concern. The pursuit of the founder of WikiLeaks has already been condemned by a number of members of the European Parliament, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Nils Melzer, representatives of the journalistic community and non-governmental organizations, who are in agreement that the case of Mr. Assange has a political background and is in effect a retaliation by the US Government for the disclosure in 2010 of crimes by the US armed forces against the civilian population in Iraq and Afghanistan. Generally speaking, the situation with Assange and the role of the United States in the persecution of an independent journalist deserves to be addressed in detail.

Reporters Without Borders have also noted the increase in illegal actions against journalists this year in the United States.

I should like to say a few words about the conference “Freedom of the Media and the Safety of Journalists in Russia and the OSCE Region: Challenges and Opportunities in the Digital Age”, organized by the Office of the Representative in co-operation with the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Once again we thank you for supporting this initiative. A constructive exchange of views took place in Moscow on the issues of ensuring free media activity, media pluralism, reporters’ safety, countering disinformation, Internet

regulation and other subjects. The forum was attended by many representatives of foreign media, who, unlike Russian journalists in the West, received accreditation without hindrance. The participants, including moderators, were chosen in such a way that a wide variety of points of view were represented at the conference. As a result, the discussion, although not easy, was open, interesting and useful.

In conclusion, we should like to emphasize that Russia co-operates in good faith with the Office of the Representative and endeavours to respond to all requests. We trust that our concerns will also receive a response. We are intent on further strengthening co-operation. We wish you, Mr. Désir, and all of the staff of your Office renewed success.

Thank you for your attention.