

PC.DEL/68/16
22 January 2016

ENGLISH
Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1086th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

21 January 2016

On freedom of expression in Turkey

Mr. Chairperson,

We, too, are extremely concerned at the situation regarding freedom of expression in Turkey. Instances of the violation of journalists' rights are becoming more frequent of late in that country and pressure is increasing on those who express their disagreement with the authorities' policies.

Highly significant in this context was Ankara's response to a petition circulated on 11 January this year by representatives of academic circles calling on the Turkish authorities to end the violence in the south-east of the country. According to some reports, 1,128 academics from 89 State and private universities in Turkey as well as a number of foreign institutions of higher education signed that appeal. Repressive measures were taken immediately against the signatories. In particular, the Turkish Council of Higher Education accused those who had signed the petition of supporting terrorism and began to verify their activities. In a number of cities the Prosecutor's Office launched an investigation into possible violations of the Criminal Code by the signatories. At the same time, a massive information campaign was unleashed in a number of Turkish media outlets against those who had made their views known.

This is by no means an isolated incident illustrating attacks on freedom of speech in Turkey. In December last year, Eren Erdem, a member of the Turkish Parliament, was accused of high treason after he gave an interview to the Russia Today television channel about deliveries from Turkey of the toxic substance sarin to so-called Islamic State fighters. A similar charge was also brought against the leader of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party, Selahattin Demirtaş, who had condemned the actions of the Turkish air force in downing a Russian bomber.

A further two journalists working for the popular newspaper *Cumhuriyet*, Can Dündar and Erdem Gül, have been accused of spying, terrorism and disclosing State secrets in connection with their publication of an article on the involvement of the Turkish intelligence services in arms deliveries to fighters in Syria.

We cannot but also remember the case involving the detention in the Turkish Hatay province of members of a Russia-1 film crew, who were questioned and then expelled from the country without any explanation.

The Syrian journalist Naji al-Jerf, who made a number of documentaries about the atrocities of fighters from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant in Aleppo in Syria, was murdered in the Turkish city of Gaziantep in uncertain circumstances.

The Turkish police used tear gas against a Russia Today camera team, who had been filming protests in connection with the murder of the Kurdish rights activist Tahir Elçi.

According to a number of human rights organizations, in 2015 investigations were launched against 7 media outlets in Turkey under various pretexts, over 150 correspondents were detained, dozens of journalists were arrested, more than 770 media workers were fired, and legal proceedings were instituted against 238 journalists.

What is surprising is that European Union, which regards itself as an ardent champion of freedom of speech around the world, has not responded to this situation. I would hope that this is not the latest case of double standards.

We call on the Turkish authorities to strictly observe their OSCE commitments on ensuring freedom of expression and pluralism of the media and also to stop placing obstacles in the way of the professional activities of journalists.

We urge the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media to continue to monitor the situation in this area closely.

Thank you for your attention.