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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1295th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL
VIA VIDEO TELECONFERENCE**

10 December 2020

On violations of freedom of the media in Latvia

Mr. Chairperson,

Unfortunately, this is the third time this year that we have had to raise the issue of the ongoing aggressive campaign in Latvia to cleanse the information field of alternative sources. Allow me to remind you that we have previously expressed our concern about the economic pressure being exerted by the authorities in Latvia on Russian and Russian-language media and the discriminatory legislative amendments against undesirable press. On this occasion, we cannot ignore the crude harassment by the Latvian State Security Service of employees of Sputnik Latvia, the Baltnews news agency and a number of Russian-speaking journalists and public figures. On 3 December, the Latvian security services took a whole set of repressive measures against them: detentions, interrogations and searches, during which telephones, computer equipment and data storage devices were seized.

We regard what happened as a blatant example of disregard for the foundations of a democratic society – freedom of the media and of expression. We find it absolutely unacceptable to speak of violation by the journalists of the aforementioned media outlets of the European Union sanctions regime. We remind our colleagues that these restrictions are of an individual nature and apply personally to the director general of the Rossiya Segodnya news agency, Dmitry Kiselyov, and cannot apply to everyone who works with the media holding company. Without even mentioning the legitimacy of such sanctions against individuals, it is utterly unacceptable to intimidate and harass contributors, stringers, photographers and public figures. They are essentially freelance employees of the agency, writing and editing texts and selecting photographs, thereby fulfilling their professional duty and exercising their right to self-expression.

The punitive action against journalists clearly smacks of political repression. It once again proves that the aim of the Latvian Government is to drive out of Latvia any media outlets that are formally or even indirectly associated with Russia. There is no other explanation for this peculiar Baltic interpretation of the European Union's anti-Russian sanctions against individuals. It is no longer surprising that the European Union, which is so concerned about the rights of journalists in other countries, chooses to remain silent over this issue. It is time, incidentally, to address the difficult situation of the press in the European Union itself – just read the latest European Parliament resolution on the subject of protecting the interests of the media.

On the whole, there is no doubt, unfortunately, that in the coming year the campaign to introduce political censorship in the information space of the Baltic countries will reach new heights under the benevolent patronage of the European Union's supranational structures. However, do not assume that such steps will be without repercussions.

We expect the new OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms. Teresa Ribeiro, to draw attention to the Latvian Government's flagrant violations of its international commitments on freedom of speech and the press and to point out to Latvia the unacceptability of censorship of the information space.

Thank you for your attention.