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**STATEMENT BY
MR. MAXIM BUYAKEVICH, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1421st MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

4 May 2023

World Press Freedom Day

Mr. Chairperson,

On 3 May, the international community celebrated the 30th anniversary of World Press Freedom Day, which was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in 1993. This anniversary comes at a time when the most sinister forms of information censorship are triumphing amid the overt powerlessness or, rather, professional bankruptcy of specialist international bodies – both United Nations ones and OSCE structures.

Total information control in the West is taking on ever new refined forms and guises, while international commitments on freedom of expression, equal access to information, respect for journalists' rights and the promotion of media pluralism continue to be flagrantly violated for the sake of advancing the bloc interests – military and political – of certain Western countries. Especially striking is the pathological hypocrisy that has long since become a political tradition, nay an unconditioned reflex of Western liberalism. One can see this particularly clearly in the case of the faux solicitude for journalists' rights and in the double standards applied when assessing the situation regarding press freedom.

Most telling in this regard is the excessive concern over the fate of Evan Gershkovich, a reporter for *The Wall Street Journal* who was caught red-handed and arrested on charges of espionage, which contrasts with the deliberate silence on the despicable assassinations of the journalists Vladlen Tatarsky and Darya Dugina and the killing of the correspondent Oleg Klokov, all of which were organized by the Ukrainian authorities.

Repression continues to be cranked up even further against Russian and Russian-language media outlets in Europe and the United States of America. Since the start of the Russian special military operation in Ukraine, Western countries have completely veered towards military dictatorship and turned the journalists under their control into "soldiers on the information front". A large-scale campaign is being conducted to suppress unwelcome voices. Over the past year alone, the media presence of Russia Today and Sputnik in the European Union has been eliminated altogether. Some Russian television channels have been driven into bankruptcy, including the German-language channel RT DE and the French-language channel RT France. In a number of European Union countries, including the Baltic States, even local

Russian-language media outlets have been uprooted and publications by nationals of those countries have come under attack, with sanctions imposed against scores of media professionals. At the behest of the EU authorities, a similar information clampdown has been initiated in the Republic of Moldova as well.

No less remarkable is the evolution of this media dictatorship as such. Whereas, with the start of the special military operation, the main pretext for blocking media outlets that diverged from the Western mainstream was the positioning of Russia as the “principal source of propaganda and disinformation”, one year later everything had changed. They had realized over in Brussels that their anti-Russian narratives were not eliciting adequate support among many EU partners, above all among developing countries, and that it was necessary to make some adjustments. In that regard it was decided not to trouble oneself further with the laborious process of determining the reliability of information content, but to shift the focus on to the “why” and “what for” of its dissemination. As a result, the concept of “disinformation” nowadays tends to be replaced in the European Union with the term “foreign information manipulation and interference”. Moreover, the EU authorities are increasingly having no qualms about admitting that reliable reports, too, may fall into that category if they do not fit in with prevailing doctrine and values and have been penned by foreign authors.

When speaking of censorship or digital dictatorship, one cannot fail to mention the passions that have flared up in the United States over the social media platform TikTok. For the US powers that be were evidently not content with instructing public servants that they should under no circumstances install that app on their corporate devices. Today the possibility is even being raised of the Chinese platform being completely prohibited in US territory and of the introduction of severe penalties, including criminal liability, for attempts to circumvent such a ban. Under a draft law currently being examined by the US Congress that bears the eloquent title “RESTRICT Act”, the US supervisory authorities would receive unprecedented powers, turning them in effect into “Internet cops” with the right to access any computer or telephone under the pretext of “combating national security threats”. Ordinary Americans who imprudently scroll through their TikTok feed via services for bypassing VPN (virtual private network) blocks or make use of the information and communication technology services of companies affiliated with foreign States face up to 20 years in jail.

Significantly, this draft law pushed by “Big Brother”, as it were, is not being questioned by other Western allies of his, which are likewise setting themselves up as mentors in the human rights sphere. That is not the case with, say, the measures of an “informative and economic nature” introduced by the Russian competent authorities in response to the infringement of Russian legislation by Google and Meta. Those measures are interpreted by the collective West exclusively as an attack on freedom of speech and a violation of the right of access to information. Yet, there is scarcely anyone here who would seek to refute the postulate that it is none other than the US and Western companies monopolizing the Internet that are brazenly engaged in the unchecked collection of personal data from their users.

Mr. Chairperson,

It is comical to listen to officials in Brussels and Washington, D.C., as they pontificate about protecting the rights of journalists and attempt to lecture others. This at a time when looking for “agents of the Kremlin” has long since become a national sport in some EU countries, notably in the Baltic States and Poland.

A vivid illustration thereof is the situation regarding the editor-in-chief of Sputnik Lithuania, Marat Kasem, who was arrested in Riga. Clearly, the only thing that this journalist now being detained in Latvia – of which country he is, incidentally, a citizen – is guilty of is working for a Russian media outlet. A further example is the revival, on 11 April, of the criminal proceedings initiated in 2020 by Latvia’s State

Security Service against 14 journalists charged with “violating the EU sanctions regime” on account of their collaboration with the Russian-owned portals Sputnik Latvia and Baltnews. These journalists face up to four years in prison for having prepared content published under their name. By the way, the proceedings against them were launched two years before the Rossiya Segodnya media group was included in a sanctions package.

I dare say that few people here will have heard and talked of the Spanish journalist Pablo González (he has dual Spanish and Russian nationality), who was arrested in Poland on charges of spying for Russia. He was arrested as long ago as 28 February 2022 after reporting on the humanitarian crisis on the Polish-Ukrainian border and is in pretrial detention to this day. However, since in Poland there is no maximum term for detention, he may continue to be held without trial for a long time yet. The abuses against Julian Assange have been going on far longer. On this, too, the authorities in Brussels and their affiliates are unanimously silent.

Similarly, they turned a blind eye to the latest provocative stunt by their big brother on the other side of the ocean, the US Government, whose diplomatic representation in Moscow scuppered the issuance of visas to members of the press entourage of Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov. I would remind you that these journalists had been meant to accompany him on a trip undertaken within the framework of Russia’s presidency of the United Nations Security Council. This act of sabotage aimed at preventing normal journalistic work does not redound to the credit of the United States as the country hosting the United Nations Headquarters. Nor to that of its tongue-tied European buddies as “champions” of media freedoms.

The media sphere has been completely “cleansed” in the territory controlled by the Kyiv regime with the direct support of its Western masters. Only media outlets serving the interests of that regime’s chieftain, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, are operating. The level of aggression against media workers is off the charts: they are being killed, without a trace of due process. And not only in the aforementioned territory. Ms. Dugina and Mr. Tatarsky were murdered in Russia through acts of terrorism organized by the Kyiv regime. I should point out at once that the organizers of these acts, who are known to us, will be duly punished regardless of any other developments.

In general, Russian or Russian-speaking journalists are constantly receiving threats of reprisal from the Kyiv regime and its “guiding spirits”; they are also landing in prison on trumped-up charges to the effect that they have ties to the “network of Kremlin agents”. Among those who have suffered such a fate is the Orthodox publicist Dmytro Skvortsov, who was arrested by the Security Service of Ukraine in February under that very pretext.

The following legislative steps have been taken in Kyiv to combat alternative points of view. On 16 December 2022, the Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian Parliament) adopted a draft law on the media that is intended to serve as a tool in the authorities’ battle against “undesirable” members of the press. This normative act establishes total control of the media by the Kyiv regime, extrajudicial blocking and a *de facto* ban on the publication of any neutral information on Russia. The European Federation of Journalists has already described that document as “worthy of the worst authoritarian regimes”, while in a statement the General Secretary of the International Federation of Journalists, Anthony Bellanger, criticized it for “endangering press freedom and media pluralism” and called upon the authorities in Kyiv “to revise the new legislation and to start a broad inclusive dialogue with journalists’ unions and the media sector”. But who put the non-independent Ukrainian Government up to such a step? Was it not those very Western countries whose representatives are hypocritically holding forth here on democratic rights? The West has need of democracy only when it is convenient. This diagnosis has long been reached by people in both hemispheres;

alongside everything else, it is a further constituent of the Western countries' total moral bankruptcy in the eyes of the rest of the international community.

Mr. Chairperson,

Everything that we have mentioned is taking place while being overtly ignored by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. It is impossible to interpret this disregard other than as propitiation, if not as a way of providing cover. Not one instance of a Russian journalist suffering violent death or persecution, to say nothing of the blocking and purging of media outlets, has prompted the publication of a relevant statement or even an expression of condolence or sympathy by the Media Representative. In these circumstances one cannot but note the pointlessness of spending the funds of OSCE participating States on an institution that is not performing the functions with which it has been tasked.

To conclude, there is no longer safety for journalists nor free journalism in the Western-controlled segment of the information space. Media workers are either enlisted to serve on the information front in the aggression against Russia and its allies, or they are publicly denounced and ostracized. That is the price which information users there are having to pay for the political wilfulness of their rulers.

Thank you for your attention.