

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1116th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

27 October 2016

On violation of freedom of the media in the United Kingdom

Mr. Chairperson,

We should like to draw attention to the case of the television station Russia Today in the United Kingdom.

On 17 October 2016, the British bank NatWest, a member of the Royal Bank of Scotland Group, took the decision to close the television station's accounts with two months' notice. The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Ms. Dunja Mijatović has already expressed her concern on this account.

Obviously, a bank has the legal right to stop managing the accounts of its customers. However, there are many aspects of this case that raise serious questions, and the assurances by the British Government that there is no underlying political motive sound unconvincing. According to our information, 73 per cent of the Royal Bank of Scotland's capital belongs to the State, and the decision by NatWest is clearly consistent with a series of anti-Russian utterances by the British authorities. What is more, the aggressive attitude of Western countries, including the United Kingdom, to Russia Today is well known.

It goes without saying that measures like this, which obstruct the normal operation of the television station, are not taken spontaneously. It makes us wonder if this step by the bank is not a way, with the agreement of the authorities in London, to eliminate a source of news that is uncomfortable for British officialdom. If this is the case, it is a gross violation of the fundamental principles of freedom of speech and the press in the United Kingdom.

This is not the first year in which Russia Today has been the target of blatant name-calling and pressure from authorities in a number of OSCE participating States. The station's employees have been threatened, their publications discredited in government-controlled media. Watchdog authorities have repeatedly attempted to revoke the station's licence on trumped-up pretexts. They even pressurize experts who dare to appear on Russia Today with their commentaries.

This is a gross violation of the OSCE's commitment to freedom of expression and the media and a manifestation of blatant propaganda, which our Western colleagues protest against so vociferously on international platforms.

It is understandable that the appearance of serious opposition in the information media should unsettle a "progressive democracy", as the United Kingdom likes to style itself, and obliges it to resort to this dishonourable tactic.

Thank you for your attention.