

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ANVAR AZIMOV,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

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Freedom of the media in the United States of America

Mr. Chairman,

At the Permanent Council meeting on 28 January, we drew our partners' attention to the fact that this high-level platform for dialogue among equals risked becoming a forum for sweeping politically motivated criticism of individual countries or groups of countries. With the next round of the Corfu discussions coming up, which are designed to help restore trust and find common approaches and points of contact, I do not think that aggravating the situation by creating an unconstructive atmosphere is helpful for our work together.

Of course, we appreciate the expressions of sincere sympathy shown by our American colleagues in connection with the tragic death of journalists and acknowledge that the search for and prosecution of the perpetrators is a task that should be carried out jointly by all of the authorities and law enforcement agencies in Russia. We would remind you that President Medvedev has given instructions to this effect. They have been widely circulated in the Russian media and we do not therefore see any sense in focusing attention on them again.

It is something else in our partners' behaviour that surprises us: their choice, in the age of the Internet and the diversification of the media, of subjects that, far from being secret, are widely discussed by the Russian public. It gives the impression that when talking about these subjects the people concerned are simply knocking at an open door. Events, some of which occurred several years ago and have already been discussed in detail, are being played over again and again with invidious consistency like a worn-out record. I cannot conceal the fact that the way human tragedies are talked about is also depressing. It is difficult to avoid the feeling after some statements that they are being made for political purposes, in some cases to complicate the discussion of problems of pan-European security.

We are not the ones who initiate this polemic, but it should be realized that things are far from rosy in the human rights sphere to the "west of Vienna" as well. I should like to recall that according to the organization Reporters Without Borders the United States, for example, is only 41st in the world in terms of freedom of the press. We are trying to figure out how a country that so extensively promotes freedom of speech in the OSCE is given such a relatively modest rating by this respected non-governmental organization (NGO).

In fact, the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America prohibits the passing of laws restricting freedom of the press. In addition, most states have enacted specific laws defending the right of journalists to disseminate objective and reliable information.

Nonetheless, it is not rare in the United States for representatives of the media to be subject to overt pressure by the law enforcement authorities with a view to coercing them to reveal sources of confidential information. In 2005, America witnessed the Valerie Plame affair, in which *New York Times* journalist Judith Miller revealed that Plame was an operative of the Central Intelligence Agency. Miller refused to disclose the sources of her information and was criminally prosecuted as a result.

A similar incident occurred with the *Washington Post* correspondent Walter Pincus, who was arrested for refusing to provide detailed information about the nuclear scientist Wen Ho Li.

The administration's media policy, which is held up as a model for the observance of freedom of speech, turns out to involve fairly strict media censorship. In December 2004, four employees of the American television channel CBS including the famous journalist Dan Rather were sacked in connection with the scandal surrounding the dissemination of supposedly incorrect information about President George Bush's service in the National Guard.

In the same year, the television reporter Joshua Wolf was sentenced to 226 days' imprisonment for refusing to turn over to the law enforcement authorities a hitherto unseen videotape showing the dispersal of an anti-globalization demonstration in San Francisco.

I should like to say a few words specifically about the co-operation of the administration with the media according to American journalists themselves.

At the National Conference for Media Reform held in Minneapolis in 2008, leading representatives of the print and electronic media sharply criticized the federal authorities for withholding information from "awkward" journalists who asked what officialdom regarded as provocative questions. Mention might also be made of attempts by the State to interfere directly with the dissemination of information.

In the wake of 11 September 2001, the United States passed special legislation entailing substantial restrictions on the activities of the media, first and foremost the Patriot Act and the law on the classification of State documents. According to these directives, various departments of the executive authorities have the right to control information, and any material whose disclosure could jeopardize national security can be classified as "confidential information".

The report on freedom of the press by the NGO Freedom House stated that the situation in New Orleans after hurricane Katrina was reported objectively on the whole by the main television stations. They all mentioned the poor preparations by the authorities for this natural calamity and the chaos that reigned in the city. Then, however, the Fox company, which is loyal to the administration, began broadcasting uninterrupted positive reports, although the situation in the area affected by the natural disaster remained critical for a long

time, a fact that CNN ceaselessly pointed out, causing the Bush administration to class it as an opposition television channel.

A number of representatives of the media have been victims of the excessive use of force by the United States law enforcement agencies. On 10 February 2006 in San Juan, Puerto Rico, for example, members of the Federal Bureau of Investigation used tear gas against 20 local journalists who had been covering their raid, although the correspondents had done nothing illegal.

It might be mentioned that according to the United States Justice Department, between 2004 and 2006 at least 2,002 people died during the course of arrests by federal or local law enforcement authorities.

With reference to the *Washington Post*, it might also be worthwhile recalling the instructions issued by the United States Department of Homeland Security giving the customs and migration services the right to confiscate any paper or electronic data carriers from Americans and citizens of other countries entering the United States of America without explanation and to study, copy, decipher and pass on information obtained by these means to other law enforcement bodies or intelligence services. We believe that such unprecedented and discriminatory measures by the United States not only confirm the double standards applied in the media world but also undermine its basic structure and natural development, given the fact that equality and the protection of information and freedom of speech are crucial to the normal evolution of the global information community.

Mr. Chairman,

I have unfortunately exhausted the time allotted, although I have mentioned just some of the problems in connection with freedom of the media in the United States and have spoken briefly and in the most general terms. I would be willing to share further graphic examples on this subject with you at the next meeting of the Permanent Council.

Thank you for your attention.