

PC.DEL/1697/15
10 December 2015

ENGLISH
Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1082nd MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

10 December 2015

On the freedom of the media in the OSCE area

Mr. Chairperson,

We are extremely concerned by the ongoing practice in a number of OSCE States of imposing groundless restrictions on the work of the media and of persecuting journalists.

For example, the Department of Foreigners in Poland has confirmed the withdrawal of the residence permit of Rossiya Segodnya international news agency correspondent Mr. L.V. Sviridov. He is obliged to leave the country by 13 December.

The Sviridov affair has been dragging on since October 2014, when the Polish authorities first withdrew the Russian journalist's accreditation and then inaugurated the process to strip him of his residence permit. Moreover, for an entire year, neither the Polish Internal Security Agency, which initiated the deportation process, nor the other competent authorities would or could explain to Mr. Sviridov or to the Polish or international communities what the complaints against him consisted of and what rules he had broken. Mr. Sviridov has appealed several times against the measures to the appropriate bodies, including the judicial authorities.

We view this situation as persecution of a Russian journalist for his professional activities and as a violation of his professional rights and the freedom to write and express opinions. We hope that the Polish court will resolve this matter efficiently and objectively, grant Mr. Sviridov's requests and protect him and allow him the opportunity to continue his work in Poland unobstructed.

Another striking example is the persecution of Hobby radio. The Polish National Broadcasting Council, which oversees the work of the media, announced its intention to revoke the company's licence. This was because of a daily hour-long, wide-ranging programme broadcast by Hobby for many years under a contract that was initially with Voice of Russia radio and then with the Sputnik agency (part of the Rossiya Segodnya media holding company). The licence was withdrawn on the grounds that granting air time to third

parties was against Polish law. This meant that the owner of Hobby effectively lost control over its broadcasting content.

Human rights activists and journalists even in Poland see these sanctions as being purely politically motivated. They point out that a precedent is being set that endangers freedom of speech in the country, because in seven years of operation with its current composition, the National Council had not withdrawn a licence from anyone before. Poland is effectively introducing political censorship.

We should also like to recall that in September this year, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland deliberately held up the processing of a visa for the deputy editor-in-chief of the Rossiya Segodnya agency, Mr. D.S. Gornostayev, who was going to the annual OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw.

Problems with freedom of the media have also arisen in another OSCE participating State. On 7 December in Turkey, the members of a Russia 1 television film crew were arrested in Hatay province on the border with Syria as they were on their way to the neighbouring province of Gaziantep. They were detained by unknown persons in plain clothes, who refused to introduce themselves or show their identification. They took the Russian film crew to a police station, where they were informed of a decision to deport them from Turkey on the stated grounds of “violating the rules for the activities of foreign journalists in the Republic of Turkey”. The authorities refused to provide any kind of explanation.

One might ask what “rules” the Russian journalists had actually broken. The impression is that Turkey was afraid that the correspondents would inconvenience the Government by uncovering illegal activities in the Turkey-Syria border area.

This incident is typical of a whole series of violations of the rights of local and foreign media in Turkey. The international community was up in arms about the arrest of the editor-in-chief of the Turkish newspaper *Cumhuriyet*, Mr. C. Dündar, and the head of its Ankara bureau, Mr. E. Gül, in connection with an article they had published about the involvement of the Turkish security services in supplying weapons to fighters in Syria. The journalists were accused of espionage, disclosure of State secrets and terrorism. They face life imprisonment. The incident was condemned by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms. D. Mijatović, as well as by several international human rights organizations.

The situation with freedom of the media in Lithuania is not entirely satisfactory either. There, a targeted policy of eliminating dissension through intimidation and pressure on undesirable media has compelled the First Baltic Channel to cease broadcasting its daily news programme “Lithuanian Time” from the beginning of next year.

The holding company Baltic Media Alliance, which the First Baltic Channel is part of, has circulated a specific statement on this matter. It noted in particular that the decision to discontinue production of the only Russian-language news programme in the country was a product of the current political situation in Lithuania. The holding company management rightly pointed out that Lithuanian policy in the area of mass communication was not currently in line with the requirements of freedom of speech. They believe that the “Lithuanian Time” television programme promoted the development of democracy in the country in that it offered a diversified perspective on local events. However, as stressed in the

statement, the media policy of the current Lithuanian authorities has little in common with European values, of which freedom of speech is a fundamental component.

At the official level, the complaints against the First Baltic Channel were first made by the State security department in its annual report for 2013. In that document, almost all of the local Russian-language media that take an affirmative line with regard to the Russian Federation are described as nothing but vehicles of the Kremlin through which it communicates its information and ideology in Lithuania. The report essentially sanctioned the start of the persecution of media disagreeable to the authorities.

We strongly condemn such actions, which are in flagrant violation of a whole range of OSCE commitments. We call upon the authorities of Poland, Turkey and Lithuania to stop obstructing reporters in their work. We expect the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms. D. Mijatović, to respond in a timely and targeted fashion to these cases of persecution of Russian journalists and to other similar incidents, as she did in the case of the *Cumhuriyet* journalists.

Thank you for your attention.