

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1156th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

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On the harassment of journalists in Ukraine

Mr. Chairperson,

The problem of the safety and harassment of journalists in Ukraine is growing more serious.

On 30 August, the Channel One correspondent, Anna Kurbatova, was detained in Kyiv. The Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) press secretary, Olena Gitlyanska, reported that the Russian journalist was going to be deported, and “it will be the same with anyone who allows themselves to discredit Ukraine.” Anyone can be expelled under this strange pretext. The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Harlem Désir, and the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists have already condemned this disgraceful act.

Earlier, on 15 August, Tamara Nersesyan, a special correspondent working for the All-Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company (VGTRK), was expelled from Kyiv and banned from entering the country for three years. Her arms were twisted while she was being detained. The reporter was not even put on a train, but was driven to a checkpoint on the border with Russia and forced to cross on foot in darkness. The intelligence services accused the journalist of “posing a threat to the integrity of the Ukrainian State”.

On 26 July, Maria Kniazeva, an employee of the Rossiya-1 and Rossiya-24 television channels, was expelled from Ukraine. According to the SBU, Ms. Kniazeva was engaged in “destructive activities”, collecting information on the situation in Ukraine and the work of the top authorities and law enforcement agencies. The Security Service did not explain what exactly was illegal in this. According to the journalist, unknown men grabbed hold of her on the street, seized her telephone, bundled her into a car and took her to a dimly lit room, where she was questioned for several hours. The journalist was told that she was “destroying the constitutional order and undermining the image of Ukraine in the eyes of the international community”. After questioning, already in the middle of the night, the correspondent was driven to the Russian-Ukrainian border and dropped off in front of a checkpoint.

In May of this year, Ramil Sitdikov, a photojournalist working for the Rossiya Segodnya news agency, and two journalists from the *Komsomolskaya Pravda* newspaper were not allowed to enter Ukraine. The photojournalist was told he was being denied entry because he did not have a substantiated reason for visiting. Journalists working for Channel One and NTV were deported from Ukraine simply for having filmed torchlit marches by nationalists. Journalists working for the Russian television channel Life News were regarded as *personae non gratae*, and the Ukrainian Security Service detained the television channel's correspondent and cameraman when they began asking Kyiv residents questions on the street. In December of last year, the Ukrainian Government refused to provide accreditation to journalists working for the RIA Novosti news agency, referring to a decision by the Verkhovna Rada stating that reporters registered as Russian could not attend meetings.

Over the past two years, the Ukrainian Government has repeatedly prevented Russian journalists from entering the country. This year alone, over 60 representatives of Russian media have been denied entry to Ukraine. For example, in 2016, without any explanation Ukrainian border guards banned Darya Grigorova, a special correspondent with the VGTRK, from entering the country for five years, informing her of this decision at the airport. Her passport was confiscated and she was forced to spend the night on a bench. In the morning she was taken to a special room and given her deportation papers.

A year earlier, the Ukrainian authorities had deported a VGTRK film crew along with the correspondent, Alexander Rogatkin. In the same year, the journalist Alexander Balitsky was deported. The leader of the radicals, Oleh Lyashko, attacked him in the Verkhovna Rada building, calling the journalist "an employee of the intelligence services".

The Channel One editorial office spent several worrying hours awaiting news about the fate of the journalist Alexandra Cherepnina. As preparations were being made to go live on air, she suddenly failed to get in touch. The television channel's cameraman was unable to find any trace of her or her belongings in her apartment. Later, Ms. Cherepnina contacted the channel and explained that she had been detained by the SBU and charged with the "falsification" of video material. The intelligence services informed Ms. Cherepnina that she was banned from entering Ukraine for three years. According to their information, the journalist had attempted to film a fake clip, which would "discredit the Ukrainian authorities".

Harassment of the media, pressure on printed publications, and attacks and assaults on journalists have become so widespread and commonplace in Ukraine that the US Congress Helsinki Commission published a separate report on freedom of the media in Ukraine. In it experts noted that journalists who attempt to draw attention to crimes by the armed forces in Ukraine or disapprove of government policy regularly encounter pressure and threats.

On 31 August, even the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine reported a rise in aggression against the media. According to the Union, the Ukrainian media community criticizes the law enforcement authorities for failing to effectively investigate crimes against journalists.

One of the first to come under attack, in early 2015, was the Inter television channel. The channel was accused of working for the "aggressor", which came down to broadcasting television programmes with the participation of Russian show business stars. There were plans to revoke the channel's licence because of this. And then they decided to simply torch

the premises. Masked thugs set fire to the editorial office, beat up the staff and prevented them from leaving the burning building, resulting in carbon monoxide poisoning. It was a similar scenario to what had happened a year earlier at Trade Union House in Odessa. Journalists compared the arson attack on the Inter offices to the burning of the Reichstag in Nazi Germany, after which massive repression of the opposition began. Lawlessness on the part of the intelligence services is what journalists who do not work for the authorities are up against.

On 9 August 2017, the editorial offices of the Ukrainian publication Strana.ua and the homes of its staff were searched. What the SBU was looking for in the journalists' homes is still not clear. A month ago, the police beat up Natalia Nagorna, a journalist working for the 1+1 television channel, simply for having photographed a checkpoint. Similarly, in 2016, the SBU suspended the accreditation of journalists working for the Ukrainian television channel Hromadske TV, Anastasia Stanko and Konstantin Reutski, in connection with a story that allegedly revealed the stationing of Ukrainian security forces.

Journalists from other countries regularly face sanctions from the Ukrainian Government. In April 2016, four correspondents working for the Mir Interstate Television and Radio Company, Belarusian citizens who wanted to make a film about the anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, were prevented from entering Ukraine. In the same year, the German journalist Saadi Isakov was also prevented from entering the country when he arrived in Odessa. In 2015, the President of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko, issued a decree enacting the decision of the National Security and Defence Council regarding sanctions against 34 journalists and seven bloggers from Russia, Kazakhstan, Germany, Israel, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and other countries.

In May of this year, it became known that the Ukrainian Government had expanded the sanction lists for foreign companies and citizens, which were published in an annex to President Poroshenko's decree. They now number 1,228 physical persons and 468 legal entities. In particular, Ukraine imposed sanctions on a number of Russian media, prohibiting access to the VKontakte and Odnoklassniki social networks and the Yandex and mail.ru services.

Personal details about Russian and foreign reporters visiting Crimea and Donbas are regularly published on the notorious Mirotvorets website in Ukraine. They receive threats. The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media at the time, Dunja Mijatović, called the publication an "alarming development which could further endanger the safety situation for journalists". Meanwhile, the Ukrainian Commissioner for Human Rights, Valeria Lutkovskaya, has been unsuccessfully calling on the Verkhovna Rada for a number of years to hold parliamentary hearings on the safety of journalists.

However, there is nothing surprising in this attitude towards journalists. The regime in Kyiv supports intolerance of any opinion that is different, and so-called patriotic activists are always at hand to deal with anyone who disagrees with them.

Journalists work in Ukraine at risk to their lives. The VGTRK staff Anton Voloshin and Igor Kornelyuk, the Channel One cameraman Anotoly Klyan, the Italian journalist Andrea Rocchelli and his interpreter Andrey Mironov, and the Rossiya Segodnya photojournalist Andrey Stenin lost their lives because of the actions of the security forces. More than two dozen journalists have died during the past three years in Ukraine.

Various human rights bodies have repeatedly criticized the repression of journalists in Ukraine. The international Committee to Protect Journalists has condemned the harassment of reporters in Ukraine and called on the authorities to ensure conditions for their free and independent journalistic activity. The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Harlem Désir, recently called on the Ukrainian Government “to respect the work of foreign journalists”. However, from what we are seeing, the Ukrainian authorities have no intention of changing their draconian policy. All the talk about the “European choice” and democratic values in present-day Ukraine only gives rise to scepticism.

We have repeatedly raised this topic at Permanent Council meetings. Once again, we call on Ukraine to stop the flagrant violations of the rights of journalists, including under the fabricated pretext of combating propaganda. We need to finally look the truth in the eye – the situation has gone too far. It is time not only for the Ukrainian Government to recognize this, but also their patrons in Washington and Brussels.

Thank you for your attention.