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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1099th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

5 May 2016

Regarding World Press Freedom Day

Mr. Chairperson,

For over 20 years now, World Press Freedom Day, which was established in 1993 by a United Nations General Assembly resolution, has been marked on 3 May.

A free, pluralistic and independent press is a necessary element for the democratic development of society. It is both a privilege and a great responsibility to be a journalist in the modern-day world, seeing that it is important to be able to deliver information to an audience without distorting its essence. This is the professional skill of a journalist or reporter.

Today, we have more than enough reasons for pondering the role of the media in ensuring the stability and security of society. Freedom of the press is not the same thing as freedom from responsibility. It is the task of the OSCE participating States to create an environment in which freedom of expression and respect for the rights, honour and dignity of every human being can be ensured in equal measure.

However, in practice things are completely different. Virtually every day we are confronted with examples of the media being used for political purposes, aggressive propaganda and unabashed doublespeak, and with flagrant violations of journalists' rights. In the meantime such actions are assessed completely differently by some in the OSCE, depending on the political situation. In some cases, incidents involving journalists are deliberately exaggerated, while in other cases things are assiduously hushed up. Unfortunately, such double standards are employed ever more frequently by certain OSCE participating States.

Surprisingly, the abundant evidence of violations of freedom of expression and pluralism of the media in the OSCE area concerning Russian journalists is lost on our Western colleagues. In this connection, the frequency of the episodes, the similarity of the situations and the characteristic uniformity of the claims made about Russian reporters do not trouble our colleagues. We need not look far for examples.

On 14 April 2016, journalists working at the Russian television channel Mir-24 were refused entry to Ukraine. On 23 April, Daria Grigorova, a special correspondent for the All-Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company (VGTRK), was barred from entering the country without any explanation being given, and was informed at the airport that she was prohibited from entering the country for five years. Prior to this, on 11 February, the National Television and Radio Broadcasting Council of Ukraine banned 15 Russian cable television channels from broadcasting, and in March revoked the licences of a further 14 channels. In April, an additional three Russian channels – Russian Travel Guide, Retro and Kinoclub – were removed from the list of foreign programmes, whose content meets the standards of the European Convention on Transfrontier Television and Ukrainian laws. These are just the latest cases. We should not forget that journalists have been killed, tortured, intimidated and persecuted in Ukraine.

In August 2015, and again in April this year, following an appeal, there was a groundless decision in Latvia not to register the office of the Rossiya Segodnya news agency. In an attempt to camouflage the political background to that issue, the agency's Russian legal advisers who were to take part in an appeal against that legally unfounded verdict were not allowed into the country.

On 29 March 2016, the Latvian domain of the Russian news agency Sputnik was shut down. In April, the television channel Rossiya-RTR was banned from broadcasting in the country for six months.

Recently, the VGTRK correspondent Ekaterina Fisenko, a cameraman and a video engineer were not allowed to cross the Estonian border. Their passports were taken away and their visas annulled. The film crew had intended to cover the search for a submarine that had sunk in the Gulf of Finland in 1943.

In March 2016, the Lithuanian authorities included a four-person VGTRK film crew in the list of undesirable persons owing to a "possible threat to national security" and expelled them from the country. Earlier, the Russian journalists had been removed from the so-called "Russian Forum" organized in Trakai by the Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In April 2016, the Czech authorities refused, without explaining the reason, to extend the accreditation of Rossiya Segodnya correspondent Alexander Kuranov and Vechernya Moskva reporter Vladimir Snegirev.

In January 2016, several groups of Russian journalists were refused access to the territory of the Republic of Moldova. These included a film crew from the Orthodox television channel Tsargrad, which has been banned from visiting Moldova for ten years; VGTRK journalists, who have been banned from entering the country for five years; Perviy Kanal, LifeNews, REN TV, RIA Novosti news agency and TASS news agency.

A number of reporters from other countries were also refused entry, including a freelance correspondent for France-Presse and Martin Dorazin, an employee at a Czech radio station, who incidentally described in detail the process of his rough deportation. All that they did wrong was to arrive in Chişinău from Moscow. It should be mentioned that, inexplicably,

we have not seen any reaction from our French and Czech colleagues nor from the European Union (EU).

In December 2015, the Turkish authorities deported a film crew from the Rossiya-1 television channel, including the journalist Alexander Buzaladze. In April 2016, Turkey's Information and Communication Technologies Authority summarily blocked the website of the Russian news agency Sputnik, after which the Turkish authorities prohibited the entry into the country of its chief editor, Tural Kerimov, who was also refused accreditation and a residence permit without any explanation.

During the recent "Democracy Spring" action in the United States of America, the police arrested Lee Camp, a journalist for Russia Today, who was simply carrying out his professional duties and reporting on the events. He was warned that, if he turned up again, he would face much more serious proceedings.

We call on the authorities of the aforementioned countries to stop suppressing freedom of the media and to ensure that their citizens can freely access diverse sources of information.

In conclusion, I should like to point out that this is by no means an exhaustive list of violations to which we have heard no distinct response from either Brussels or Washington, who are usually so concerned about the situation in Russia.

With regard to Sergei Reznik, whom the distinguished representative of the United States mentioned, we should like to remind you that we have already provided clarification on this matter. Evidently our American colleagues do not have enough new facts to incriminate Russia so they have to rake up old ones. I should like to call attention to the fact that Mr. Reznik is a blogger and not a professional journalist. He was sentenced under articles that have nothing to do with journalistic activity. Scurrilous publications on the Internet are not journalism.

Let me now turn to the questions raised by the distinguished representative of the European Union. We have already provided clarification on two occasions in Permanent Council meetings regarding the investigation into the attack against a group of human rights defenders and journalists in Ingushetia. An investigation is under way and the competent Russian agencies are taking all the necessary measures to find the guilty parties in this crime.

We do not understand the concern about the amendments regarding so-called "news aggregators" to the Russian law on information, information technologies and the protection of information. This initiative is currently under discussion and the specialist committees of the State Duma have a number of legal comments on this draft. In particular, the proposal to make aggregators liable for the information they disseminate was deemed excessive. In addition, it was recommended that a number of concepts, including the term "news aggregator", be made more specific before the next reading. Leading websites have also provided their comments on the draft law.

We have repeatedly explained the situation regarding freedom of expression and pluralism of information sources in the Russian territory of Crimea. We are engaged in constructive dialogue with Ms. Dunja Mijatović on these and other matters. We take note of the desire of our EU colleagues to hear the voices of Crimean journalists. We hope that the

EU countries will not start to impose visa-related obstacles, as is customary, if they wish to attend OSCE events or other forums.

Thank you for your attention.