

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1191st MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

5 July 2018

**In response to the report by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the
Media, Mr. Harlem Désir**

Mr. Chairperson,

We should like to begin by expressing our condolences to the delegation of the United States of America following the attack on 28 June at the offices of the newspaper *Capital Gazette* in the state of Maryland, in which five staff members were killed and several others were seriously injured. We are sure that the authorities are taking every necessary measure to clarify the circumstances and punish those responsible.

Distinguished Mr. Harlem Désir,

We thank you for your presentation and for the detailed review of your activities over this reporting period.

We welcome the Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media's active engagement in the broad range of issues that come under its mandate. We note the efforts to defend media freedom and pluralism, ensure safe conditions of work for journalists, and raise professional standards, including through development of self-regulation mechanisms. We have always said that a responsible attitude by journalists to their work is an essential condition for improving the quality of the information they provide and is also an important element in combating the spread of so-called fake news and incitement of intolerance.

But we must not forget that every media outlet has its own views on what is or is not permissible. For this reason, common basic principles and also tools that make it possible to correct journalists' errors and settle disputes between media outlets and their audiences are an important element for developing responsible journalism.

If the media community can achieve these objectives itself, we would only welcome this. But if it cannot, this is where the State steps in. The current state of the information environment has shown a clear need to elaborate effective legal frameworks to resolve problems concerning the spread of illegal content, hate speech, disinformation and

information that violates the right to protection of private and family life. As things stand today, we are not at all sure that these issues can be resolved through media self-regulation alone.

We know that the Representative on Freedom of the Media pays great attention to issues concerning protection of freedom of speech in the fight against terrorist threats. We respect the professional views of the Office, but it should not go beyond its mandate.

We welcome voluntary initiatives by media outlets that take a serious approach to covering issues related to combating terrorism. In this respect, we should like to recall the Anti-Terrorist Convention (a kind of journalists' code of conduct for covering terrorist attacks and counter-terrorist operations) adopted in April 2003 by a group of leading Russian TV channels, radio stations and print media. We think that such measures on the part of the media community show its maturity and understanding of its responsibility to society.

Mr. Chairperson,

Unfortunately, we see in the OSCE area an increasingly frequent practice to restrict media activity and persecute journalists on the basis of their ethnicity or the views they express. Russian media have been the target of discriminatory policies and unpunished persecution in a number of participating States: Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Moldova, Ukraine, the United States, the United Kingdom, France and other countries. It is precisely this issue that requires the utmost attention and conscientious efforts on the part of the Representative on Freedom of the Media.

Last week, a very serious incident took place. The Ukrainian Security Service banned entry into Ukraine for journalists working for the Russian media, Yevgeny Primakov (VGTRK) and Paula Slier (Russia Today), who, paradoxically, had planned to take part in a conference on media freedom and pluralism. Both journalists were deported from the country and banned from entering for five years (incidentally we saw nothing about this in your report). This is far from the first such incident.

For the Ukrainian authorities it has become routine practice to decide of their own accord who is or is not a journalist and who has the right to express a point of view and who should be denied this right. We know well that the Ukrainian Government is doing everything possible to prevent its citizens from receiving alternative information. But we have questions regarding the Representative on Freedom of the Media's attitude towards this issue.

The "regret" that you expressed over the deportations of Paula Slier and Yevgeny Primakov is rather mild given the frequency with which Russian journalists are being subjected to such action by the Ukrainian Government. Most interesting is that our distinguished colleagues from the United States and the European Union show not the slightest concern over such matters as they affect Russian media, which are of no interest to Washington and Brussels. We firmly believe that double standards cause great harm to the reputation of the OSCE and its institutions.

In your report, you mention several specific cases, including the situation with the "director" Oleg Sentsov, who was sentenced for preparing a terrorist attack. But Mr. Désir, we should like to ask you, on what basis do you assert that his detention in custody is

“unjustified”? In your view, was the evidence obtained during the investigation of this case insufficient grounds?

As for the case of Roman Sushchenko, I repeat that his detention in Russia has nothing whatsoever to do with any professional activity as a journalist. Unlike the situation with the Chief Editor of RIA Novosti Ukraine, Kirill Vyshinsky, who the Ukrainian authorities are prosecuting on fabricated charges of treason for his attempts to provide truthful information on what is happening in Ukraine. We call on you, Mr. Désir, to make every effort to secure Kirill Vyshinsky’s release.

Freedom of speech is also about the possibility of expressing different points of view. This can be achieved only by ensuring a diversity of information sources and free access to them and not through bans, deportations and other undemocratic measures.

In conclusion, we should like to stress that we are ready to continue and to develop constructive co-operation with the institution of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. We hope that our concerns will be taken into account.

Thank you for your attention.