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Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1255th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

16 January 2020

On violations of freedom of the media in Estonia

Mr. Chairperson,

We have already taken note of the fact that Estonia continues to violate the linguistic and educational rights of the Russian-speaking population. On this occasion, we must focus on the Estonian Government's flagrant violation of its international obligations on freedom of speech and of the media.

In mid-December last year, employees at the Estonian office of the Sputnik news agency received letters from the Estonian Police and Border Guard Board containing threats of criminal prosecution if the journalists did not terminate their employment contracts with the Rossiya Segodnya international news agency by 1 January 2020. Moreover, the letters stressed that such measures could also apply to any person holding information about natural and legal persons associated with Sputnik who fails to report it to the Financial Intelligence Unit of the Police and Border Guard Board. As the unit's head, Mr. Madis Reimand, told the press, the letters containing threats of criminal prosecution are allegedly in connection with the European Union's sanctions against the Director General of Rossiya Segodnya, Mr. Dmitry Kiselyov.

It should be noted at the outset that, in accordance with Council Regulation (EU) No 269/2014 of 17 March 2014, which established restrictive measures against natural and legal persons, the aforementioned sanctions imposed on Mr. Kiselyov apply only to his personal financial assets.

We will not dwell now on the legitimacy and appropriateness of the EU's actions, notably in the context of human rights protection. This is a topic for a separate serious discussion. It should be noted only that Rossiya Segodnya is a Russian State enterprise and is not the property of its director. Sputnik is a part of this structure. We are not aware of any other unilateral EU restrictions that would allow national authorities to so unceremoniously interfere with freedom of speech.

It is clear that direct pressure is being exerted on the foreign media. This situation is absolutely unacceptable and goes far beyond Estonia's fundamental democratic principles and international obligations to ensure unhindered freedom of the press, freedom of expression and equal access to information.

By taking such actions, the Estonian Government has violated the Helsinki Final Act, in which the participating States agreed to "make it their aim to facilitate the freer and wider dissemination of information

of all kinds, to encourage co-operation in the field of information and the exchange of information with other countries, and to improve the conditions under which journalists from one participating State exercise their profession in another participating State". It has also violated the decision of the OSCE Milan Ministerial Council of 2018 on the safety of journalists, in which participating States committed themselves to bringing "their laws, policies and practices, pertaining to media freedom, fully in compliance with their international obligations and commitments ... so that they do not limit the ability of journalists to perform their work independently and without undue interference".

The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Mr. Harlem Désir, has expressed concern about the events surrounding Sputnik and has not only called on the Estonian authorities to stop putting pressure on the news agency but has also confirmed that no sanctions had been imposed on it by the EU. The OSCE Secretary General Mr. Thomas Greminger has also taken note of the situation. The European Federation of Journalists has also condemned the campaign of intimidation against journalists launched by the Estonian authorities and has notified the Council of Europe accordingly.

Unfortunately, the Estonian Government has not heard or wanted to hear the statements by Russia or the international community. The activities of the Estonian editorial office of Sputnik have been suspended since 1 January this year. Overnight, 35 employees of the news agency, 33 of whom are Estonian citizens, lost their jobs.

Against this background, the silence of the relevant structures of the EU regarding the latest violation of freedom of the media by Estonia and Brussel's failure to react to the Estonian Government's references to the EU's standpoint is bewildering.

We call on the esteemed Mr. Désir to continue monitoring this issue and to push for the Estonian authorities to re-examine their discriminatory policies.

Thank you for your attention.