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**STATEMENT BY
MR. MAXIM BUYAKEVICH, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1422nd MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

11 May 2023

In response to the report by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media

Mr. Chairperson,

Ms. Ribeiro, we have studied your report carefully.

Like all the activities of the Office headed by you, the report is politically biased and skewed. We regard as absolutely unacceptable both the selective approach to journalists' rights followed by this institution of late and the situation whereby the postulates of international law and OSCE commitments are held to apply exclusively in relation to a few hand-picked countries. We should like to remind you once again that the principle of impartiality in assessing the media situation and responding to incidents is enshrined in the Media Representative's mandate. And that principle continues to be grossly violated.

In particular, in the report, just as in numerous public remarks, participating States are offered an unequivocal political assessment of the events in and around Ukraine, including the Russian special military operation. It features clichés, copied from the agendas of the authorities in Washington, D.C., and Brussels, that reflect NATO-centric dogmas as to how the system of international relations is meant to be perceived – for example, the term “rules-based order”. However, no one has authorized the Media Representative to assess the security situation or geopolitical realities in the OSCE area. Ms. Ribeiro, you were appointed to your post to work on media issues. You should therefore occupy yourself with them – in an even-handed, professional manner, without overtly favouring a small group of States.

This OSCE executive structure is not a branch office of the European External Action Service (EEAS) or the US Department of State. Yet, the Media Representative's way of reacting to incidents involving journalists is exclusively cast in the mould of EEAS and State Department narratives. For example, the report mentions how Corrado Zunino, a correspondent for the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*, was injured in the zone of the special military operation, while the journalist Bohdan Bitik, who was accompanying him, was killed. We mourn all journalists who have lost their lives or otherwise come to harm in the OSCE area when carrying out their duties. That being said, we are frankly puzzled at Ms. Ribeiro not having felt similarly “saddened and shocked” by the brutal assassinations of the Russian journalists Darya Dugina and Vladlen Tatarsky and by the killing of the correspondent Oleg Klovov.

Also telling is the excessive solicitude over the fate of Evan Gershkovich, a correspondent for *The Wall Street Journal*. I must stress that he was caught red-handed and detained on suspicion of being engaged in espionage. And yet appeals for his release are being made by the Media Representative. However, Ms. Ribeiro, you are not standing up so explicitly for Marat Kasem, the editor-in-chief of Sputnik Lithuania who was arrested in Riga, or, for that matter, for Julian Assange. Or for the Chilean journalist Gonzalo Lira López, who was abducted by the Security Service of Ukraine on 5 May and whose fate remains unknown to this day. We are dealing here with outrageous hypocrisy.

This hypocrisy also manifests itself in the passages about “foreign agents”. Repressive use of corresponding legislation is mentioned in relation to my country; appeals are made to the Republika Srpska (Bosnia and Herzegovina) to refrain from adopting a similar law. However, not a word is said about the existence of registers of foreign agents, or about plans to set up such registers, in the West. This despite the fact that, during Ms. Ribeiro’s reporting period, in March of this year, the Canadian Government announced the launching of consultations on the creation of such a registry. Significantly, the seasoned US authorities extended a helping hand to their Canadian brethren in this difficult process – over in the United States of America the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) has been actively applied since as far back as 1938. Similarly, in the United Kingdom it is intended to adopt legislation resembling FARA. In late 2022, the UK Government put forward an amendment to the most recent version of the National Security Bill, which would provide for the introduction of a “Foreign Influence Registration Scheme” (detailed information is available on the UK Government website). How would you, Ms. Ribeiro, comment on these initiatives?

The discrimination in the digital and information spheres in which so-called advanced democracies are engaging is demonstrably being passed over in silence as well. This discrimination manifests itself in the complete purging of alternative sources of information and any undesirable media presence from national information spaces. Illegitimate unilateral restrictions have begun to be aggressively imposed by the West and other members of the international community. States are peremptorily requested to stop the retransmission of Russian television channels and radio stations that are popular with local viewers and listeners. Businesses are told to observe a ban on running commercials on those channels and stations, and to remove them from satellite broadcasting networks. Big Tech firms are expected to block and shadow-ban their content, while Western media and non-governmental organizations are asked to disseminate information that does not correspond to reality, along with outright slander, so as to justify this arbitrariness in the eyes of global public opinion. As you know, it is first and foremost Russian media outlets that have been hit by politically motivated bans and blocking of content. We shall not set about enumerating the obvious acts of Western repression – everyone is quite familiar with them as it is. We covered some of them at the Permanent Council meeting on 4 May. In this context it is legitimate to ask how all this can be squared with Ms. Ribeiro’s argument that situations where “media is captured by commercial or political interests” are detrimental to democracy. Because that is precisely what is happening in the information space of Western States.

We also noted the Media Representative’s assessments of the state of the media sphere in Moldova following her visit to that country. In particular, we noted the point about how the Moldovan Government “continues to undertake important steps towards democratic reforms and remains committed to the respect of freedom of expression and media freedom”. This positive passage has nothing in common with contemporary Moldovan realities in the media sphere. At the instigation of the US Government and the EU bloc, a full-scale purging of Russian and Russian-language media from the socio-political sphere is under way in the country. Since March 2022 a ban on Russian news and current affairs programmes has been in force in Moldova; Russian-language television channels are fined on a regular basis. Eight television channels and news sites there have had their licences revoked or access to their content blocked just since December 2022. How can you, Ms. Ribeiro, explain the lack of an adequate reaction by the Media Representative to such acts of “media apartheid”?

And likewise the lack of a reaction to the similar measures by the authorities in Kyiv, which do not balk at any means to tighten their totalitarian censorship. One example is the media law recently adopted in Kyiv, which has received highly negative assessments from the professional community of journalists, yet has not been addressed by your Office. We have repeatedly drawn the Media Representative's attention to how the obnoxious Myrotvorets website, which is curated by the Kyiv regime, is operating from US servers. We have pointed out how, by publishing the personal data of, *inter alia*, public figures, publicists, journalists and even children, that site is putting these people's lives at immediate risk. And how after some of them have perished at the hands of extremists or terrorists, a tag reading "liquidated" (what a disgrace in our day and age!) appears next to their surnames. How long can one keep pretending that nothing untoward is going on? Or is it the case that those whose reporting does not fit into the collective West's narratives may be "cancelled", persecuted, discriminated against or even murdered with impunity?

Of course, with the exception of those Russian journalists who are on the "right side of history" and are relaying narratives that are "correct" from the Western point of view. The report just so happens to feature a list of such journalists. Now, you point out that the Media Representative is mandated to, among other things, work together with the authorities of participating States, academia and civil society. We do not see any such interactions in the context of Russia. We believe that this selectivity does not allow the Office to analyse the situation objectively, leading to a one-sided account of what is happening in the Russian Federation.

Mr. Chairperson,

We have cited just the "freshest" and most glaring examples of double standards in the work of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. They demonstrate that Ms. Ribeiro's tolerance of what is going on in the West and in countries under its thumb has become absolute, and that our appeals for the politicization of this executive structure to stop are being persistently ignored. It is no longer possible to speak of any sort of even-handedness on the part of that institution: the Media Representative's Office has compromised itself for good and is not performing the functions with which it was tasked. This will be taken into account in the adoption of administrative decisions in the current year.

Thank you for your attention.