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Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY
MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1372nd MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

5 May 2022

World Press Freedom Day

Mr. Chairperson,

On 3 May, we celebrated World Press Freedom Day, which was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in 1993. This is a good opportunity to analyse what is happening in the global media space.

We have to admit that, in recent months, the real, not the declarative, cost of Western demagoguery related to human rights and freedoms has become abundantly clear. We have all witnessed how international commitments on freedom of expression, equal access to information, respect for journalists' rights and the maintenance of media pluralism have been blatantly and unashamedly disregarded. Meanwhile, complex and now overt information attacks have been launched against Russia.

The creation of dividing lines in the information space and the stigmatization of the media community are not new phenomena. We have repeatedly raised these issues at various international forums, including meetings of the Permanent Council, relevant OSCE events and during contacts with the Representative on Freedom of the Media.

In spite of this, our appeals to stop the shameful censorship of information went unanswered and the countries of the "collective West" continued to systematically squeeze Russian information presence out of their media space. The discriminatory campaign against Russian journalists includes expulsions, non-admission to events, stop lists, fines and harassment. All this is passed off as a response to some kind of threat to national security.

However, the so-called liberal democracies soon found a "convenient excuse" – Russia's special military operation in Ukraine – to give legitimacy to the long-planned repression of the Russian and Russian-language press. As you know, almost immediately (on 2 March) the European Union took an unprecedented step with regard to one of the fundamental principles of democracy – freedom of access to information – and banned the broadcasting and distribution of Russian media content by Sputnik and RT in Europe. RT English, RT UK, RT Germany, RT France, RT Spanish and Sputnik were blocked from broadcasting in all of the countries of the European Union. RT was officially shut down in the United

Kingdom on 3 March, and in the United States of America on 4 March. The Moldovan authorities also decided to get rid of Sputnik, blocking its website on 7 March and cutting off its radio broadcasts.

But European Union officials did not think that went far enough. On 9 April, the European Union “bloc” included Russian journalists and the heads of several media outlets in their “fifth sanctions package”. These include Oleg Dobrodeyev, Director General of the All-Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company, Pavel Gusev and Vladimir Sungorkin, Editors-in-Chief of *Moskovsky Komsomolets* and *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, Sergey Mikhailov, Director General of the TASS news agency, and many others. On 4 May, sanctions were imposed on a number of media outlets, including military correspondents Yevgeny Poddubny, Alexander Kots and Dmitry Steshin personally, for their coverage of events in Ukraine. That is, in effect, for the journalists’ performance of their professional duties.

The largest US digital platforms – Google, YouTube and Meta – have also stopped camouflaging their political involvement. In addition to the widespread blocking of any accounts with content that does not fit the platforms’ absolutist agenda, RT- and Sputnik-related applications were removed from the App Store and Google Play, their monetization and purchase of advertisements were banned, and the position of Russian media outlets in search results was lowered.

Access to such media outlets as NTV, Mir, RBC, RIA Novosti and many others was blocked to users from some European Union countries. In Latvia, at the insistence of the National Electronic Mass Media Council, they went even further, banning the broadcasting of Russian television channels, even those of an entertainment nature.

Mr. Chairperson,

Unfortunately, in their Russophobic frenzy, some have reached the point of absurdity. As you know, thematic conferences are traditionally held on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day by UNESCO – the specialized United Nations agency for international co-operation in the field of information. Unfortunately, Russia was not allowed to participate in this year’s event in Uruguay. The UNESCO Secretariat, on behalf of the forum’s organizers, rejected under a spurious pretext Russia’s applications to hold a special session and to give expert presentations during the panel discussions. We solemnly declare that the outcomes of this “get-together” will have no relation to the concept of World Press Freedom Day or to such important values as pluralism of opinion, inclusive coverage, freedom of speech, and access to information.

At the same time, more and more people in Europe and the United States are observing demonstrative interference in freedom of speech. As Bundestag member from the Alternative for Germany party Edgar Nayok pointed out very accurately, “[f]irst digital platforms banned Trump, then critically minded academics and opposition politicians during the coronavirus [pandemic], and now Russian journalists are being blocked as well. We have long observed that the channels of critically minded German media outlets and bloggers are being censored and shut down by Internet corporations, notably with the help of governments.” The German politician reasonably asks: “So where is this much-lauded freedom of speech and human rights?”

The frustrating thing about this situation is that the global community is no longer able to understand the other side’s point of view. Citizens of the West are offered a one-sided interpretation of world events that has been “cleansed” of any opinions that do not follow the official narrative. Yet the right of every person to access to information is proclaimed in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The international environment cannot and should not be an obstacle to the work of the media.

In some countries, attempts to break through the established news paradigm are suppressed by various repressive means, including criminal proceedings. In Austria, for example, offenders face a fine of 50,000 euros for rebroadcasting a programme or reposting a publication by Russia Today or Sputnik.

Alternatively, here is also a telling example from a country that is ranked in the top three in the World Press Freedom Index. Swedish newspaper *Dagens ETC* broke off relations with journalist Kajsa Ekis Ekman simply because she had co-operated with the US news site MintPress News, which from time to time reprints the content of Sputnik and Russia Today. Andreas Gustavsson, the editor-in-chief of *Dagens ETC*, confessed that he had gathered compromising material on the employee from the Internet. It turns out that, in addition to articles in MintPress News, the woman published posts on social media in defence of the right of Western politicians to give interviews to Russian media outlets. You can draw your own conclusions.

Mr. Chairperson,

A campaign to spread disinformation and discredit the Russian authorities – unprecedented in its scale and intensity – has been launched against Russia. Since the beginning of this year, millions of fake stories have been uncovered and their number keeps growing. There is no doubt that this “infodemic” is a well-planned campaign against our country. Here are some basic figures and facts. According to the Safe Internet League’s monitoring data, since 24 February, the amount of fake stories and disinformation about the Russian armed forces’ special operation and about Russian citizens in general has reached over 6.5 million. Some 26 million social media accounts are influenced by a wide variety of radical views. The company Meta, which we have already mentioned, went even further, explicitly allowing hate speech and calls for violence against Russian citizens and Russian-speaking people on its resources, for which it was recognized as an extremist organization in Russia.

Against this backdrop, the inaction and ineffectiveness of the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media is disheartening. Let me remind you that this executive structure was created specifically to curb and prevent the phenomena described above. Our numerous appeals to Ms. Teresa Ribeiro to provide an adequate assessment of what is happening in the Organization’s media field, and our repeated reminders of the need to observe the principle of objectivity and balance in her work, have gone unanswered. These failures suggest the need for a thorough assessment of the Representative’s mandate, a calibrated staffing policy and a review of the current system for protecting the rights of journalists and the media and ensuring freedom of access to information and pluralism of opinion with a view to implementing possible reforms.

Thank you for your attention.