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PC.DEL/398/20/Rev.1
7 May 2020
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ENGLISH only

Joint statement by Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, the European Union and its Member States, Georgia, Iceland, United Kingdom, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Switzerland and Ukraine, as well as on behalf of the Partner for Co-operation Australia.

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1265 Vienna, 30 April 2020

Joint statement on threats against journalist Elena Milashina in the Chechen Republic, Russia

This statement is on behalf of the following 38 participating States: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, the European Union and its Member States, Georgia, Iceland, United Kingdom, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Switzerland and Ukraine, as well as on behalf of the Partner for Co-operation Australia.

We are deeply concerned about the latest threats that could be clearly understood as a death threat against Novaya Gazeta journalist Elena Milashina made by the Head of the Chechen Republic Ramzan Kadyrov in response to the publication of her article about the spread of COVID-19 in Chechnya. On the 12th of April, Milashina's article was published in Novaya Gazeta, and on the 13th of April Ramzan Kadyrov published a video on his Instagram account in which he clearly threatened to silence Milashina.

We are further concerned by the fact that Kremlin Press secretary Dmitry Peskov dismissed the threat, calling it an "emotional" reaction and "nothing out of the ordinary", and that the Russian Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media, Roskomnadzor, following an order by the Attorney General, required Novaya Gazeta to delete Milashina's article as they claimed it contained "false socially significant information...that threatens people's lives and wellbeing".

We echo the strong condemnation expressed by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and urge Russia to uphold the right of journalists to investigate and report on the COVID-19 pandemic without intimidation. Media must be able to report on the pandemic and citizens must have access to information.

The recent threats against Elena Milashina are the latest in a series of worrying and unacceptable attacks against journalists and human rights defenders in the Chechen Republic. A few months ago, Elena Milashina and Marina Dubrovina, a human rights lawyer, were subjected to a physical attack in connection with their professional work in the Chechen Republic and the matter was raised in the OSCE Permanent Council

in February. We would welcome an update from the Russian Delegation on the state of the investigation. We also call on the Russian Federation authorities to condemn the threats made by the Chechen government authorities against Milashina and to fully investigate them.

We remain deeply concerned regarding the overall dire human rights situation in the Chechen Republic and the climate of hostility against human rights defenders, lawyers, independent media, and civil society organizations. In this context, we reiterate our call upon the Russian authorities to make full use of the 2018 report under the Moscow Mechanism and to implement all recommendations contained therein.

We remain concerned over the issue of safety of journalists in the Russian Federation in lights of reports of incidents of intimidation, threats, violence and questionable criminal charges. We are greatly concerned about the impunity surrounding crimes against journalists and human rights defenders. This situation puts serious pressure on freedom of expression in Russia. We reiterate the calls by the Representative on Freedom of the Media on the Russian authorities to intensify their efforts to end impunity for crimes committed against journalists. In Milan 2018 the Ministerial Council called on participating States to “condemn publicly and unequivocally all attacks and violence against journalists such as intimidation, harassment and threats of all forms, including legal, political, technological or economic”. We call on the Russian authorities to take a firm stance against any such events. In line with the OSCE commitments, the Russian authorities must ensure the safety of all journalists, as well as ensure that they can continue their vital work without fear of reprisal and that attacks and violence against them do not happen again.