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**STATEMENT BY MR. ANDREY KELIN,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 992nd MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

27 March 2014

In response to the report by the Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia

Mr. Chairperson,

We welcome Ambassador Peter Burkhard, Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, to the Permanent Council meeting and thank him for his informative report. We share his positive assessment of the internal reforms in Serbia and commend Belgrade's constructive role in strengthening stability and security in the Balkans.

We take a positive view of the Mission's work. We support its efforts to assist the Serbian Government in implementing legislative and judicial reforms, developing democratic institutions and local self-government, protecting the rights of national minorities and strengthening regional co-operation. We commend the Mission's work on implementing a housing programme for refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs).

We value the Mission's contribution to improving the Serbian law enforcement system and countering corruption. We consider the policy of reducing the police components of OSCE field missions in the Western Balkans to be short-sighted, particularly in view of the fact that organized crime is increasingly using what is known as the "Balkan route", one of the key elements of the "heroin" network in Europe, for illicit trafficking, not only in heroin, but also in other narcotics, and also for trafficking in human beings, weapons and counterfeit goods.

We commend the Mission's role in south and south-western Serbia. We urge it to closely co-ordinate its activities in these regions with the Serbian authorities and to act exclusively at their request, to respond firmly to provocative rhetoric, which is a source of destabilization in the region, to counter the spread of religious extremism and to assist in establishing inter-ethnic and interfaith harmony.

We welcome the fact that the Mission is continuing to develop a regional approach in its activities. Many problems in the Balkans, particularly organized crime, drug trafficking, trafficking in human beings and trafficking of human organs are transborder in nature. In order to counter these challenges effectively, it is important to ensure that the efforts of all the OSCE missions in the region are combined. The task of assisting with the return of refugees

and IDPs deserves particular attention. Joint action by the Balkan States to deal with the consequences of natural and man-made disasters does more than anything else to facilitate the building of peace, confidence and good-neighbourly relations in the region. The Russian-Serbian humanitarian centre in Niš is making a useful contribution to joint efforts of this kind.

Mr. Chairperson,

When we speak about Serbia today, we cannot fail to recall a recent tragic anniversary. It is 15 years since the commencement of the bombing of Yugoslavia by NATO forces led by the United States of America. Flouting international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the Helsinki Final Act and without the authorization of the United Nations Security Council, a group of OSCE countries bombed another OSCE country for 11 weeks under a spurious pretext. It should not be forgotten that the “trigger” for the aggression against a State that posed no military threat to any of its neighbours was actually the hasty statement in January 1999 by William Walker, Head of the OSCE Kosovo Verification Mission, on the events that had occurred in Račak, which he described as “genocide”. We must also remember that the subsequent investigation by Finnish experts commissioned by the European Union confirmed that the bodies found in Račak were definitely not those of local civilians, but of members of armed formations. In essence, the investigation showed that it was a matter of provocation.

Seventy-eight days of bombing using the most modern weapons of destruction caused the deaths of 2,000 civilians. More than 5,000 persons were injured and more than 1,000 disappeared without trace. It was by no means only defence installations and military-industrial enterprises that were destroyed, but also many civil infrastructure facilities – more than 1,500 towns and villages, factories, 60 bridges and transport hubs, power plants and power lines, 30 per cent of all schools and around 100 monuments. According to estimates by Serbian experts, the material damage from the aggression amounted to between 60 and 100 billion dollars. This placed a heavy burden on the country’s economy. The use of depleted uranium ammunition also had terrible consequences and is still affecting the health of ordinary people. The number of cases of cancer has increased in Serbia.

We are not speaking about this in an attempt to justify the policy of Slobodan Milošević. Rather, our aim is to emphasize the absolute inadmissibility of a situation in which arbitrary and unfounded statements by an OSCE official became a cause of war in Europe under the pretext of averting a “humanitarian catastrophe”.

The appeals made today “not to dredge up the past” are motivated by only one thing, the desire to shamefully cover up the fact that it has become clear that the principles of international law were blatantly disregarded. We are certain that the events that occurred 15 years ago and their destructive consequences for international relations should never be forgotten.

In conclusion, we should like to join in wishing Ambassador Burkhard and his team further success in their challenging work.

Thank you for your attention.