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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1261st MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

5 March 2020

In response to the report by the Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo

Mr. Chairperson,

We thank the distinguished Ambassador Jan Braathu for his detailed report on the situation in the Serbian province of Kosovo and Metohija and the activities of the OSCE Mission there.

The change in the composition of Kosovo's leadership has not brought any qualitative change with regard to the Kosovo settlement process. As you know, the backbone of the so-called "Government" of Kosovo confirmed after the drawn-out internecine struggle was formed by the well-known Self-Determination ultranationalist group headed by Albin Kurti. The new authorities in Priština are flaunting their confrontational programme with regard to Central Serbia, to start with by categorically dismissing the possibility of any kind of compromise with the Serbian Government in the framework of the settlement process.

It is hardly appropriate to make overtures to Albin Kurti's "cabinet of ministers", when its first steps confirm the aim of continuing the policy of ultimatums and blackmail of Serbia pursued by its predecessors, whose efforts for a long time blocked dialogue with the Serbian Government. Clearly, the announcement by the Kosovan "prime minister" of the suspension from 15 March of tariffs on raw materials imported from Central Serbia and from Bosnia and Herzegovina is not the proverbial "step forward" but the latest example of a ploy. Unsurprisingly, Serbia's refusal to abandon its principles in the settlement process is being interpreted in advance as a pretext for reviving the illegal tariff barriers.

The reaction of Priština's Western patrons to the actions of the new authorities in the region leaves no doubt about their readiness to continue to support the nationalistic ambitions of the Kosovo Albanians and to flirt with radicals while at the same time putting the "squeeze" on the Serbian Government to somehow "normalize" its relations with Kosovo. It should be understood that the blind patronage of the Kosovo Albanians merely complicates implementation of the agreed solutions and ultimately renders the negotiation process meaningless. If the wish to establish conditions for the resumption of genuine dialogue between Belgrade and Priština is sincere, it would be necessary not only to ensure that the Kosovo authorities fully and unconditionally revoke the anti-Serbian tariffs but also to make the Kosovo Albanians honour their earlier commitments undertaken in Brussels, including the most important of these, namely the creation of a Community of Serb Municipalities in Kosovo.

Concrete results are needed in the work of the special court established in The Hague in 2017 under the auspices of the European Union to investigate the crimes of the Kosovo Liberation Army. All those responsible should be given the punishment they deserve, regardless of the posts they hold today. There is a need to prevent a revival of the crackdown on Serbs in the region and the creation of a “Kosovo army”, which would contravene the provisions of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244.

The OSCE Mission plays a very important role in helping to create a multi-ethnic and tolerant society in the region, in which the rights of representatives of all nationalities are guaranteed equally. For understandable reasons, the main focus of attention should be on protecting the highly vulnerable Serb population of Kosovo. We are grateful to the field presence for its activities aimed at safeguarding the political, religious, social, educational and linguistic rights of non-Albanians. We note the role of the OSCE Mission in assisting with the return of refugees and internally displaced persons, including the report on this topic distributed in December 2019. The analysis of this report confirms the depressing situation regarding the return of Serbs expelled from Kosovo.

To the group of colleagues, who, we do not doubt, will reiterate their desire to see Kosovan representatives in the OSCE, we should like to repeat that Kosovo Albanians may participate in our joint events only as part of the Serbian delegation. Anything else would grossly contravene the provisions of UN Security Council resolution 1244 and would have deleterious consequences for our Organization. Instead of dubious initiatives of this kind, we would suggest focusing on encouraging the authorities in Priština to engage in constructive dialogue with the Serbian Government.

In conclusion, we confirm that Russia supports the achievement by the parties of a viable and mutually acceptable solution on the basis of UN Security Council resolution 1244. It should be consistent with international law and be approved by the UN Security Council, as it is a matter of ensuring international peace and security.

Thank you for your attention.