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**STATEMENT BY  
MR. MAXIM BUYAKEVICH, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF  
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1461st MEETING OF THE  
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

15 February 2024

**On the situation in Kosovo and Metohija**

Madam Chairperson,

The situation of the native Serb population in the Serbian Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija continues to deteriorate rapidly. It is simply impossible not to notice the seriousness of the matter and to continue ignoring it, even if that is what some would very much want. On 8 February, at the request of Serbia and with the support of Russia, an urgent meeting of the United Nations Security Council was held in the format of an open briefing, during which the participants discussed the state of affairs in the province. Now, the situation is extremely alarming and is continually worsening because of the policy of pushing the Serbs out of their ancestral lands that is being systematically and methodically implemented by Albin Kurti's "cabinet".

For example, in 2022 the provincial "authorities" forbade the organization of arrangements for the expression of the people's will in Kosovo and Metohija in connection with the referendum on the adoption of amendments to the Serbian Constitution, and also in connection with the combined parliamentary and presidential elections in Serbia. During the early parliamentary election in December 2023, the Kosovo Serbs were denied the opportunity to vote according to their place of residence. In this way the established practice of holding elections in the province with the assistance of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo has been destroyed by the "authorities" in Pristina.

Intimidation of the Serb population has become a consistent pattern for the Kosovo "authorities". The figures speak for themselves. In 2023, there were 178 ethnically motivated attacks on Serbs and their property. More than 450 such incidents have been recorded in total since the radical Self-Determination Movement came to power in 2021.

An embargo on the import of Serbian goods remains in place – the value of items for personal use imported through the existing checkpoints may not exceed 150 euros. The activities of the illegitimate "mayors" of the four Serb-majority municipalities continue. Raids on warehouses and shops in the north of the province under the spurious pretext of "searching for weapons and smuggled products" have become a regular occurrence. Since the autumn of 2023 the Kosovo "police" have ramped up the number of detentions and arrests of non-Albanians. At the same time, the rearming of this "police force" has been announced, as

has the introduction of compulsory military service by 2028, which runs counter to United Nations Security Council resolution 1244, a fundamental instrument for the settlement process. Should these plans come to fruition, it would be a flagrant violation of that resolution if the US Government were to supply the “authorities” in Pristina with 24 Javelin anti-tank missile systems and 246 missiles for them. That is a clear and blatant provocation by the United States of America, one that gravely increases the risks of destabilization both in the province itself and in the entire Balkan region.

Most outrageous is the recent decision by the “Central Bank of Kosovo” to prohibit the circulation of the Serbian dinar in the province and any financial transactions in that currency from 1 February onwards. As a reminder for those who are unaware: in Kosovo and Metohija there are around 100,000 recipients of salaries and social security benefits who will be left without means of subsistence if the aforementioned step is put into practice. The functioning of public institutions, including kindergartens, hospitals and schools, is in jeopardy, as is the functioning of businesses. As we know, the implementation of that odious decision has been suspended under pressure from the international community – suspended but not revoked. In other words, the “bomb” planted underneath the negotiation process for a Kosovo settlement is still very much a live bomb.

We should like to dwell separately on the problem of usurpation and Albanization of the Serbian cultural heritage in Kosovo and Metohija. To cite only the most recent developments: in late December of last year the “Ministry of Culture of Kosovo” declared two medieval Orthodox churches (in South Mitrovica and Zubin Potok) to be “Catholic” and set about repairing them. In January of this year, the “authorities” in Pristina carried out an essentially forcible takeover of yet another site of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC): without holding any preliminary consultations with the SOC, they fenced off the ruins of the Monastery of the Holy Virgin of Hvosno, a medieval structure dating from the thirteenth century, and began excavation work involving the use of heavy machinery. At the same time, a sign was put up in the Albanian language referring to this important monument of Serbian history and architecture as the “remains” of some sixth-century basilica. The Ministry of Culture of Serbia has commented on these provocative actions by the Kosovans, describing them as a continuation of the policy of intimidation of the Kosovo Serbs and appropriation of their cultural heritage. It is difficult not to agree with that assessment. Just for reference: in a thematic report by the OSCE Mission in Kosovo from July 2022, the structure is referred to precisely as the Monastery of the Holy Virgin of Hvosno.

Madam Chairperson,

In the light of what has been said, the inevitable conclusion to be drawn is that over in Pristina they are seeking to ensure, as quickly as possible, that living conditions in Kosovo and Metohija become intolerable for the province’s Serbs. It is apparently in this way that the Kosovo “authorities” want to avoid having to implement the inconvenient agreements on establishing a Community of Serb Municipalities in Kosovo – for if their envisaged scenario does come true, the province may well be left without any Serb population. Unfortunately, as we can see, this flawed logic is working: more than 14 per cent of Serbs have abandoned the province over the past year.

Moreover, the European Union, under whose auspices the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue is taking place, prefers to exert pressure on Serbia instead of facilitating a settlement within the existing international legal framework, which has not been rescinded by anyone. In the European Union they are currently talking about incorporating the unsigned “Brussels-Ohrid documents” from February and March 2023 into the negotiation process. Simultaneously, the Serbian Government is being sent an unequivocal political signal, one that looks more like blackmail. On 8 February, the European Parliament adopted a resolution “on the situation in Serbia following the elections”. That document calls for an “international investigation” into the elections held in Serbia on 17 December 2023, and if such an investigation finds that the Serbian authorities

were involved in voter fraud and are unwilling to implement key recommendations, then the European Union may suspend its funding for Serbia. Shame on the Members of the European Parliament.

The Russian Federation's position remains unaltered. A sustainable settlement of the Kosovo problem entails comprehensive implementation of Security Council resolution 1244. The solution reached must be in the interests of Serbia and the Serbian people and be endorsed by the United Nations Security Council.

Thank you for your attention.