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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1138th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

23 March 2017

On the anniversary of the bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

Mr. Chairperson,

On 24 March 1999, a group of OSCE participating States, united in the North Atlantic Alliance, launched a barbaric bombardment of a sovereign State – the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. This act of aggression was a gross violation of the Charter of the United Nations, the provisions of the Helsinki Final Act, the generally recognized norms of international law and the United Nations Security Council resolutions on the Kosovo settlement. The punishment of Yugoslavia was a demonstration of the strength and permissiveness of NATO with respect to the Balkan State, which did not pose a military threat to any of its neighbours. The barbaric bombing of peaceful cities and villages of the sovereign European State lasted 78 days.

The reason for the aggression against the State, in fact, was the ill-judged statement in January 1999 by the Head of the OSCE Kosovo Verification Mission, William Walker, regarding the events in the village of Račak, describing what had occurred there as a “genocide”. The subsequent investigation carried out by Finnish experts commissioned by the European Union confirmed the falsity of the claims by the United States diplomat. In Račak, it was not the bodies of civilians that were found, but of members of armed groups. It is now certain that it was a deliberate provocation.

The principal motive for NATO’s actions was the desire to protect Kosovo Albanians from “harassment” by the Serbian authorities and to prevent a “humanitarian disaster”. In reality, the operation aimed to undermine the political and economic potential of Yugoslavia, which pursued an independent policy in the region, and to cause the subsequent fragmentation of the country. Air strikes were planned regardless of the results of international negotiations on the Kosovo problem. It is characteristic that the main flow of refugees from Kosovo came just after the bombing began.

According to the most conservative estimates, during the 78 days of bombing, NATO forces fired a total of 2,300 rockets and dropped 14,000 bombs. As a result of the air strikes, around 2,000 civilians, including children, died, while many thousands were injured or

disappeared without a trace. Later, NATO would cynically call civilian casualties “collateral damage”. More than 200,000 Serbs left their homes in Kosovo, to which they are still unable to return.

Along with defence facilities and military and industrial enterprises, the targets of NATO’s “humanitarian bombing” included civilian infrastructure – more than 1,500 settlements, factories, 60 bridges and transport hubs, power plants and power lines, 30 per cent of all schools and around 100 monuments. The material damage from the aggression, according to Serbian experts, amounted to between 60 and 100 billion dollars, which placed a heavy burden on the country’s economy. As a result of the use of ammunition with depleted uranium, which became the main cause of cancer in the areas subjected to bombing, innocent people continue to die.

NATO’s “humanitarian intervention” in Yugoslavia has dealt a major blow to the basic principles of international relations, has seriously damaged the trust between States and has provoked a return to the forefront of the military aspects of security, both in the Euro-Atlantic area and beyond.

Unfortunately, the correct lessons have so far not been learned from the events of 18 years ago. The practice of applying “double standards”, the unilateral and selective interpretation of the norms of international law, has remained. States continue to attempt to unceremoniously interfere in the internal affairs of other States with the aim of imposing their own will, even changing unwanted legitimate governments and openly using force.

We call on our partners on the latest anniversary of the tragic events of March 1999 to once again contemplate the symbolic significance of this date. It is necessary to return to building a reliable system of European security based on the principle of its indivisibility, equality and mutual consideration of interests, excluding further degradation of the system of international peace and security that has been undermined by the unilateral aggressive actions of a group of States against Yugoslavia.

Thank you for your attention.