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PC.DEL/1859/21  
9 December 2021

ENGLISH  
Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY  
MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE  
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1348th MEETING OF THE  
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

9 December 2021

**On the security situation in the Western Balkans**

Madam Chairperson,

We have taken note of the press conference given in Riga on 1 December by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following a meeting of the foreign ministers of the Alliance's member countries. Among the Russophobic propagandistic clichés, which we are well and truly tired of, one point was nevertheless made which we would gladly subscribe to, namely that the situation in the Western Balkans is alarming. I am referring above all to developments in Kosovo and Metohija and in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which could potentially have negative ramifications for the entire region.

Thus, at the end of September, the Kosovo Albanians essentially attempted to take over the Serb-populated areas of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija by force and to establish control over them. To ensure greater visibility, it seems, and with the international missions' effective connivance, special forces, armoured vehicles and heavy weapons were massed in the north of the territory. Civilians were subjected to violence and a number of people had to be hospitalized. Thanks to laborious efforts, it proved possible on that occasion to prevent the situation from slipping into an uncontrollable scenario.

Already on 13 October, though, under the pretext of an operation to combat smuggling, there occurred another provocation, accompanied once again by the deployment of Kosovo security forces to the north of the territory, where they opened fire on citizens who rejected such methods. As everyone will recall, scores of people were seriously wounded as a result. There were even reports about the alleged involvement of UK intelligence agencies in organizing the disturbances. We shall not go into the details. This is ultimately something to be discussed by the Governments of Serbia and the United Kingdom. We would merely point out that an old saying springs to mind: there is no smoke without fire.

Unfortunately, reports of incidents involving Serbian cultural and religious heritage sites have become commonplace. As the most recent example we may cite the briefing note distributed by the OSCE Mission in Kosovo on 2 December, which gives the details of how a Serbian Orthodox church in the town of Zvečan/Zvečan was burglarized on 30 November.

The authorities in Priština continue defiantly to ignore the European Union's demand that the agreed arrangements for visits by officials be respected. Thus, on 2 December, the Director of the Kosovo and Metohija Office of the Serbian Government, Mr. Petar Petković, who had planned to deliver humanitarian aid to the Kosovo Serbs, was once again unable – for the fifth time since the start of the year – to enter the territory owing to a ban by the so-called Kosovo authorities.

The prospects remain bleak for the establishment of the Community of Serb Municipalities in Kosovo, given the overt sabotaging by the authorities in Priština of the relevant commitment that they undertook back in 2013.

In view of this, Mr. Albin Kurti's claim, made in an interview on 16 November, that there had been some kind of "tectonic shift for good" in the Belgrade-Priština dialogue seems completely divorced from reality. Today it is evident that the EU-sponsored negotiation process has in fact reached a stifling stalemate.

The territory's inhabitants themselves recognize the futility of the approach adopted by the Kosovo "authorities". The results of the second round of local elections held on 14 November confirm that their policies are flawed.

The Russian Federation's position remains unaltered. We consider it unacceptable that deadlines are being imposed and that pressure is being exerted on just one of the parties to the dialogue while the other is being overtly pandered to. The most important thing now is to find a mutually acceptable and viable solution based on United Nations Security Council resolution 1244.

Madam Chairperson,

When speaking about the challenging domestic political situation that has emerged in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is essential above all to point to its root cause. That is obvious for all to see, namely the flagrant and unacceptable interference in the internal affairs of that sovereign State by Mr. Valentin Inzko, who at the time was in the process of stepping down from the post of High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina. The amendments to the Criminal Code of Bosnia and Herzegovina that he arbitrarily imposed are in effect an act of "juridical violence" against the country's legislative system and a direct violation of the policy of handing over all responsibility to the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as approved by the Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council. As a result of that irresponsible act, inter-ethnic dialogue and all the achievements of the post-conflict period have been endangered. Stability and security both in the country itself and in the wider region have been sorely tested.

So what happened afterwards? Well, what happened is that we witnessed attempts to illegitimately appoint Mr. Christian Schmidt to the post of High Representative – something that, for understandable reasons, is categorically rejected by one of the entities that make up Bosnia and Herzegovina. Moreover, the self-styled "High Representative" continues to play a destructive role, thereby aggravating the political and institutional crisis in the country. For example, he confirmed the recent decision by the authorities in Sarajevo to exclude the management of farmlands and forests from the competence of the Republika Srpska, which directly contravenes the Dayton Peace Agreement. These episodes once again confirm the need to wind down this institution of foreign tutelage over Bosnia and Herzegovina, which merely generates problems and undermines peace and stability – fragile as they already are – in that State.

We are puzzled by the methods through which Western States are seeking to resolve the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The lawfully elected leadership of the Republika Srpska is arbitrarily blamed for all woes. Threats are being dished out to employ the illegitimate but ever so beloved sanctions "toolbox".

Sanctions, sanctions and sanctions all over again. These words have become like a mantra, despite the fact that it is obvious that such unlawful restrictions are counterproductive.

Here are some fresh examples. In a letter transmitted to the members of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina on 16 November, the United States Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, stressed that attempts to “destabilize the DPA [Dayton Peace Accords] will be met with appropriate action, including the consideration of sanctions”. Following the meeting of the foreign ministers of the EU Member States held on 15 November, at which the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina was discussed, among other matters, warnings were issued about the possibility of imposing sanctions against certain officials there who, in the view of the EU authorities, posed a threat to the country’s peaceful existence. At the plenary session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg on 23 November, the European Commission and the Council of the European Union were exhorted to impose sanctions against the Serb member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina and his entourage.

It is difficult to understand what exactly is being pursued through such demonstrative disregard and disrespect for the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its constituent peoples, for the Dayton Agreement itself and for the multilateral efforts to bring about inter-ethnic reconciliation. We consider the policy of demonizing the Serbian people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which certain elements within and outside the country are engaged in, to be utterly unacceptable.

Meanwhile, experience shows that if the balance of interests is taken into account and if there is readiness for constructive co-operation, it is possible to find acceptable solutions in the interests of the peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In particular, following intensive efforts, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted, on 3 November, a resolution extending the mandate of the European Union military operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (ALTHEA) for a further year.

We support the OSCE Secretary General, Ms. Helga Schmid, and the Chairperson-in-Office, Ms. Ann Linde, who visited Sarajevo on 22–23 November and 4 October respectively, in their striving to exert a positive influence on the situation.

In a context of instability, the value of impartial work by the OSCE missions in the region is all the greater. That being said, it is of crucial importance not to allow any departure from a status-neutral position, whether by our Organization’s officials or by its field operations.

Thank you for your attention.