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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1285th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

15 October 2020

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

Mr. Chairperson,

We are grateful to the Head of the OSCE Mission, the distinguished Ambassador Jan Braathu, for his comprehensive report on the activities of the field presence and the situation in Kosovo and Metohija in the Republic of Serbia.

The report provides an objective view of the scale of the systemic problems that persist in the territory, caused by the long-term stagnation in the Kosovo settlement. Many efforts have been made in recent months to move the peace process on from the impasse it is in. However, the results achieved to date can hardly be entered as “assets”. We are convinced that any mediation that ignores the provisions of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 is unlikely to achieve a viable solution to the Kosovo problem.

The latest changes in the members of the “government” of Kosovo have not made any difference to the obstructionist course by the authorities in Priština in their dialogue with the Serbian Government. At best they have once again demonstrated the servile dependence of the Kosovo Albanian leadership on the United States of America, whose interests in the Western Balkans are in fact served by it. As the OSCE Mission’s observations show, after the “reset” at the request of the US Government, the “cabinet of ministers” of Kosovo continues to act with eyes fixed on the radical strata of the Kosovo Albanian elite, who remain loyal to the pseudo-ideals of the notorious “Kosovo Liberation Army” (KLA). The political leaders in the territory are in competition only as to who hates the Serbs most, but the common denominator is still resistance to compromise with the Serbian Government on issues of fundamental importance.

Against this background, the barely resumed Belgrade-Priština dialogue under the auspices of the European Union risks being stalled again. The results of the expert discussion held in Brussels on 17 September but also the subsequent breakdown of the dialogue caused by Kosovo on 28 and 29 September are indicative of this situation. Because of the obstruction by the Kosovans, meaningful dialogue is once again impossible. The representatives of the authorities in Priština are again refusing to discuss the establishment of the Community of Serb Municipalities in Kosovo. This is a line that successive Kosovan negotiators have been pursuing for a long time, openly sabotaging their commitment to form the Community since 2013.

The question remains as to whether Brussels, which has taken over the mediating role, is going to press the Kosovo authorities to implement the agreements reached with the participation of the European Union. I would like to believe that the European Union understands its responsibility for the fate of the negotiation process.

It is equally important to achieve real results in the work of the special court for the investigation of crimes by the “Kosovo Liberation Army”. Several years of stalling by the judicial body cast doubt on its determination to bring to justice the KLA members who have the stain of bloody crimes on their hands. It cannot be ruled out that the high-profile cases against the “president” of Kosovo, Hashim Thaçi, and the leader of the Democratic Party of Kosovo, Kadri Veseli, will also be wound up in the future. It is no coincidence that during the preliminary investigations Mr. Thaçi was, as he himself said, not asked any questions whatsoever about the removal of organs from hundreds of people and the creation of a sales network on the black market in Europe.

So far, unfortunately, the timid attempts to bring specific charges against the leaders of the Kosovo Albanian gangs have been accompanied by scandals, such as the leaking of court records with personal information about trial witnesses. This not only undermines the court’s objectivity, but also directly threatens the lives of those who dared to tell the truth about the brutal crimes of the Kosovo separatists.

It is time to understand that the system of impunity built up in Kosovo for the elite KLA field commanders is hindering the creation of harmonious relations among the territory’s ethnic communities and cultivating an atmosphere of intolerance. This can be seen from the statistics mentioned in the report by the Head of the OSCE Mission on the return to Kosovo of local Serbs and on ethnically motivated crimes: even a very small increase in the number of returnees to their native districts – bearing no relation to the hundreds of thousands of Serbs expelled from their homes – is accompanied by an increase in crimes against the Serb population. Local law enforcement bodies, although responding to incidents, are clearly trying to avoid bringing those responsible to justice.

To judge by the observations of the OSCE field presence, the desecration of Serbian religious sites and cemeteries is also continuing. The situation in Kosovo is exemplified by the incident cited in the report, in which in order to stop illegal roadworks in the Special Protective Zone around the Monastery of Visoki Dečani, the Head of the OSCE Mission was called upon to intervene once more and to take a group of Western ambassadors to visit the site. These problems occurred despite the fact that the Monastery’s entitlement to the land has been confirmed by the two highest courts in Kosovo. There is only one logical explanation: the representatives of the Kosovo authorities do not even respect their own institutions nominally responsible for ensuring the rule of law.

Unfortunately, the reality of the situation in the territory does not stop the most ardent supporters of the authorities in Priština from seeking to obtain international recognition of Kosovo’s pseudo-statehood. We also consider the decision by the Albanian OSCE Chairmanship to invite a representative of the “Kosovo provisional administration” to an informal meeting with Mr. Braathu, Head of the OSCE Mission, to be an example of this. It runs counter to United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 and the 2002 Porto Ministerial Council decision on the role of the OSCE Chairmanship-in-Office, and damages the Albanian Chairmanship’s reputation as an honest broker.

In that regard, we cannot but mention the report of a joint meeting of the Albanian Government and the “government” of Kosovo in Tirana on 2 October. The documents signed during the event mention the possibility of “erasing” the borders between Albania and Kosovo and of embarking on the “amalgamation”

of Albania and Kosovo in various sectors. What we are seeing here is a liberal interpretation by Albania, which holds the OSCE Chairmanship this year, of territorial integrity as applied to Serbia.

We are convinced that such solutions are detrimental to the Kosovo settlement process and nullify efforts to find a mutually acceptable solution to the problem in the framework of the Belgrade-Priština negotiations. For its part, Russia will continue to support the parties in achieving a sustainable and mutually acceptable solution based in principle on resolution 1244 that is consistent with international law and will be endorsed by the United Nations Security Council.

Mr. Braathu,

Since this is your last appearance before the Permanent Council as Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, we should like to thank you sincerely for your work. Under your leadership, the Mission has seriously increased its targeted assistance to the Serb population of the territory, actively advocated equal political, economic, social, religious, educational and linguistic rights of local residents, and tried to find systemic solutions to the long-standing problems of Kosovo by improving basic local legislation. We wish you success in your new endeavours.

Thank you for your attention.