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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1160th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

12 October 2017

**In response to the statement by the
Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Macedonia**

Mr. Chairperson,

We welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Macedonia, Mr. Nikola Dimitrov, to this OSCE Permanent Council meeting.

In Russia, it was with sincere empathy that we followed the settlement of the acute phase of the internal political crisis in Macedonia, which lasted for two years. We consistently advocated the resolution of the disputes through dialogue between the Macedonians themselves within the framework of existing legal procedures and without the intervention of external forces. We look forward to the early restoration of the confidence of the Macedonian people in government institutions and in the democratic process, and the systematic enhancement of future stability and social well-being.

We support the establishment of Macedonia as a democratic State subject to the rule of law, in which peace and mutual understanding between its inhabitants is ensured. We believe that there is no alternative to the development of this process on the basis of the inter-ethnic model for government formation and taking into account Macedonia's historical, cultural and ethnic and religious characteristics. In the case of the OSCE, such assistance is provided through the OSCE Mission to Skopje. It is gratifying that the assistance of the field presence is still relevant for the authorities.

In principle, we believe that it is possible to overcome most of the common difficulties for South-Eastern Europe through the co-ordinated efforts of all the States of the region, as well as States from outside the region participating in the post-crisis stabilization of the Western Balkans. We are confident that the synergistic potential inherent in the philosophy of co-operation will help to resolve the inter-ethnic and interreligious disputes that have developed as a result of historical processes and that have been exacerbated by social and economic problems and manifestations of extremism and terrorism, made worse by sudden increases in migrant flows from countries in Asia and Africa. We trust that, acting in a spirit of mutual understanding and tolerance, the countries of the Western Balkans will

ensure the preservation and enhancement of their rich and diverse cultural heritage. Imposing alien moral and ethical standards is hardly capable of ensuring peace and prosperity in this region.

We are aware of Macedonia's aspiration to integrate into the European Union. We hope that a condition of this process would not be the Macedonian Government's refusal to develop historically and economically sound co-operation with other States, including with our country. Recurring attempts to present the Western Balkans as a sphere of exclusive interest of the European Union and the imposition of the artificial choice "either with the West or with Russia" are fundamentally wrong and rule out the possibility of multilateral co-operation in the interests of Macedonia itself and of the Balkan region as a whole. For our part, we reaffirm our interest in maintaining mutually beneficial relations with Macedonia.

As it is stated in the 1999 Charter for European Security, when choosing ways of ensuring security, it is important to remember the key right to neutrality enshrined in the Charter and the principle that States will not strengthen their security at the expense of the security of other States. I recall, as it is written in Section II, paragraph 8 of the Charter, that: "Within the OSCE no State, group of States or organization can have any pre-eminent responsibility for maintaining peace and stability in the OSCE area or can consider any part of the OSCE area as its sphere of influence." This paragraph is fully applicable to the Western Balkans. Accession to NATO is unlikely to strengthen the national security of Macedonia, which, it seems to us, is not being threatened by any neighbouring State. Moreover, membership of the alliance is neither the only nor the cheapest way of ensuring security. The North Atlantic bloc has repeatedly demonstrated its inability – both politically and militarily – to effectively combat modern challenges and threats. But the negative consequences of the policy of NATO expansion are obvious and lead to the fragmentation of the European security space and the growth of politico-military tensions on the European continent. The assertion that there is no alternative to Western Balkan countries joining NATO is therefore rather far-fetched. There are countries in Europe that ensure their own security outside the politico-military blocs.

As for the bilateral relations between Russia and Macedonia, there is serious unrealized potential. We reaffirm our commitment to the consistent building of an equal partnership in the areas of politics, trade and economy and culture and humanitarianism, in pragmatic dialogue and in the joint resolution of international problems.

It is in our common interest and power to see that the whole of South-Eastern Europe (including Macedonia) becomes a region of good-neighbourly co-operation and prosperity, and not of politicized controversy and confrontation.

Thank you for your attention.