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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1088th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

4 February 2016

**In response to the statement by the Head of the
OSCE Mission in Kosovo, Mr. Jean-Claude Schlumberger**

Mr. Chairperson,

We join in welcoming the Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, Mr. Jean-Claude Schlumberger. We thank him for his report, which was certainly of interest.

The views expressed confirm that the situation in the Serbian territory of Kosovo and Metohija is still far from stable and predictable, and it requires the close attention of the international community. We consider that the Mission's main task, as set out in its mandate, is still to bring about inter-ethnic reconciliation and mutual respect and to establish in the territory a viable multi-ethnic society where the rights of each citizen are fully and equally respected. We believe that the work of the field presence should also continue exclusively to take a status-neutral line, in compliance with United Nations Security Council resolution 1244, which remains the international legal basis for a Kosovo settlement that is binding for all.

The unsatisfactory situation of non-Albanian communities was confirmed in the fourth thematic report distributed by the Mission in November 2015, which indicates that no progress had been made in this regard in the three years since the previous report. Efforts by local authorities to promote inter-community dialogue, reconciliation and mutual understanding have been extremely limited. It is still a challenge to ensure the safety of non-Albanian communities, restore their property rights and preserve the Serbian Orthodox and cultural heritage, freedom of movement and non-discrimination in respect of language policy, education, health care, employment and the media. This state of affairs utterly precludes the possibility of positive developments with regard to the return of hundreds of thousands of refugees and internally displaced persons to the territory. We trust that the OSCE Mission will pay greater attention to these issues.

This unfortunate situation is exacerbated by the region's social and economic difficulties, with high unemployment and pervasive corruption. On top of this, the crime rate in Kosovo has climbed, amid problems with illicit trafficking in arms and drugs. Radical and

extremist sentiments are spreading. All of these factors make Kosovo a breeding ground for recruiters of terrorist groups, including the “Islamic State”. There are already extremely disturbing signs. On 31 January 2016, armed Islamists were arrested by Kosovar forces at the Orthodox monastery of Visoki Dečani, which is listed as a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Site in danger. We share the view of the monastery’s archimandrite, Sava Janjić, that the rise of Islamic fundamentalism is no less dangerous for Kosovo Serbs than for Kosovo Albanians. We call on the Mission to track extremist movements of this kind closely and to report them promptly to the Permanent Council.

We note that Priština is continuing to obstruct the establishment of a special court for the consideration of crimes committed by members of the Kosovo Liberation Army, including trafficking in human organs, which was reported at the time by Dick Marty, a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. We believe that a special court must start work as soon as possible, and that offenders should be punished regardless of their current situation.

We are counting on the effective promotion of dialogue at a high political level between Belgrade and Priština, with Brussels mediating, and we view this as an important tool to help stabilize the situation in the territory. We note the Serbian side’s constructive attitude at the previous meeting on 28 January and its constant openness to negotiations with Kosovo Albanian representatives. Unfortunately, the willingness of Priština to deliver on its compromise agreements is still in doubt. As we have encountered in another country-level subject, instances of agreements being altered to disrupt compliance with them have become increasingly common. We call on the Kosovo Albanian authorities not to let the practical registration of the Community of Serb Municipalities in Kosovo drag on and to adhere to the format for the community that was established by the Brussels agreements.

With regard to the announcement about the holding of early parliamentary elections in Serbia, we trust that the Kosovo Serbs will be guaranteed appropriate conditions for voting. We believe that the Mission will provide the necessary assistance in this regard, drawing on the experience of the 2014 elections.

Turning to the arguments voiced in this room about the participation of representatives of Kosovo in OSCE events, we hold the view that they may be present in the room only as members of the delegation of Serbia, in accordance with the Rules of Procedure of the OSCE.

We can confirm that the Russian position on the Kosovo settlement remains the same: a solution can be found solely by political means, on the basis of dialogue between the parties.

In conclusion, we should like to wish Ambassador Jean-Claude Schlumberger and his team further success in their difficult, but extremely important work.

Thank you for your attention.