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STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1404th (SPECIAL) MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL

12 January 2023

On the presentation of the priorities of the OSCE Chairmanship of North Macedonia

Minister,

Allow me to make some fundamental comments on aspects of your address. We trust that the tentative unifying signals voiced there will be endowed with practical content. Extremely challenging work lies ahead that calls for diplomatic finesse, wisdom and self-possession from the Chairmanship. It is difficult to overestimate the value of mutually respectful dialogue and a joint search for common principles in a context of growing politico-military confrontation. There is evidently a long-overdue need to get a grasp of the root causes of the current crisis, which was provoked by the attempts of several States, chiefly NATO members, to strengthen their own security at the expense of the security of others. It is no less important to recognize that seeking to yoke the OSCE to serving the interests of individual participating States and their alliances is a flawed and dangerous course.

We hope that over in Skopje they will draw lessons from the lamentable experience of their Polish predecessors, who tried to foist unilateral Russophobic approaches on the Organization, in violation of the mandate of the Chairmanship-in-Office as laid down by the well-known 2002 Porto Ministerial Council decision. The prospects for restoring trust and keeping the OSCE governable, as well as the Organization's future, will hinge on the willingness of North Macedonia's team to act as an impartial and transparent "manager". Taking into account the whole spectrum of participating States' opinions, strict compliance with the Rules of Procedure, respect for the consensus nature of adopted decisions – these are not whims but a prerequisite for our Organization to survive. The principle of the sovereign equality of all participating States must be treated as axiomatic. The OSCE's fairly tattered reputation needs to be mended from within, starting with the renunciation of "squabbling-shop" methods of holding discussions at the Permanent Council and with a return to a culture of professional deliberations on a whole range of issues, even the most complicated ones.

We are obliged once again to caution against designs to subordinate the OSCE's entire work to promoting the approaches of a number of Western countries with regard to the situation in and around Ukraine. That is something in which the Polish Chairmanship openly engaged. In view of some of the formulations that were to be heard in your address today, Mr. Chairperson-in-Office, we would remind you of the decisions of OSCE decision-making bodies, in particular of Permanent Council Decision No. 485 of

28 June 2022, which stipulates that the leadership of our Organization must act in public exclusively in accordance with approaches agreed on by consensus.

It is utterly unacceptable to stir up an artificial fuss over Ukrainian matters to the detriment of other areas of work. Future historians must not have to rack their brains when analysing the outcomes of North Macedonia's Chairmanship, as they will have to do with the Polish one as they try to understand whether it was outrageous incompetence on Poland's part or a conscious policy aimed at destroying the OSCE as a platform for dialogue, which even in difficult times needs to take place with account taken of the interests of all participating States. We sincerely hope that North Macedonia's tenure at the helm of the Organization will be remembered for more constructive approaches.

We for our part unequivocally emphasize that, in a context of systematic lies and application of double standards by the West, Russia will continue to actively defend itself from the multilevel hybrid aggression being carried out by several NATO member countries, spearheaded by the United States of America and the United Kingdom, against the very foundations of the Russian Federation's statehood and sovereignty, our country's security interests and the prospects for the favourable development of our society and State. Russia will not deviate from the chosen path of strengthening its sovereignty and protecting its people. That being said, in contrast to the arrogant position of States that imagine the entire surrounding world to be their backyard and consider that world to be obliged to live according to the "rules-based order" invented by them, we are not closing ourselves off from honest dialogue aimed at bringing about a just world order.

Minister,

You devoted a considerable part of your address to setting out the work in all the dimensions of the OSCE. We regard this as a sign of North Macedonia's willingness to set about overcoming the grave legacy of the previous Chairmanship, which put on hold many important strands of inter-State co-operation.

We expect our Organization to thoughtfully engage – paying due attention to the interests of all parties – in efforts to settle regional crises in its area of responsibility. We advocate the swift resumption of substantive work in the format of the Geneva International Discussions on Security and Stability in the Trans-Caucasus. We reaffirm our willingness to help the "5+2" format to return to normal operation, provided that the relevant conditions materialize. It is impossible not to be alarmed by the surge in tensions in certain areas of the Western Balkans. Against this backdrop, the mandated activities of our Organization's field operations in the countries of the region acquire particular significance.

With regard to the normalization of Armenian-Azerbaijani relations, we have consistently advocated the full implementation of the entire set of arrangements agreed on by the leaders of the Russian Federation, the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan.

We are convinced of the need to restore the OSCE's traditionally high profile – now sadly sagging to a considerable extent – when it comes to countering transnational challenges and threats, with particular emphasis on those issues that directly pose a threat to the lives and health of our citizens.

One of the key areas of work here must be the combating of the international threat of terrorism in all its manifestations. Additional efforts are required to curb the spread of terrorist ideology, cut off financial and material support for terrorists, and break the nexus between terrorism and organized crime. Due attention must also be paid to the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters.

We call upon the Chairmanship to treat the fight against drug trafficking with the utmost seriousness. Despite there being a robust mandate and an extensive set of commitments, this topic has been artificially crossed out from the agenda over the past few years. We categorically disagree with such an approach.

We are prepared to continue looking for common ground as regards the security of information and communication technologies (ICTs). It is necessary to keep on implementing the confidence-building measures so as to reduce the risks of conflicts in cyberspace, albeit avoiding attempts to use the set of measures for politically biased ends. Meanwhile, we welcome the Chairmanship's decision to have the Permanent Representative of Hungary, Károly Dán, carry on chairing the OSCE informal working group tasked with developing ICT-related confidence-building measures. Over the past few years, he has demonstrated a high level of professionalism in that post and made a significant contribution to the development and intensification of "cyberdialogue" at the OSCE.

In our view, it is important to support discussions on the aforementioned issues through relevant thematic conferences as well. Such high-level meetings have an obvious added value in terms of exchanging best practices and working out joint ways of tackling cross-border challenges. The lack of such conferences in 2022 was the result of unjustified, arbitrary decisions by the Polish Chairmanship. Unlike the OSCE, the other relevant multilateral formats – in particular, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, among others – did not slow down but, rather, continued to pay due attention to all the aforementioned issues.

We expect active efforts by North Macedonia to allow full-scale work in the economic and environmental dimension to resume. A draft Permanent Council decision on the theme, agenda and organizational modalities for the 31st OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum needs to be agreed on as soon as possible to ensure that the first Preparatory Meeting, scheduled for late February, can be prepared properly. It is our understanding that the topics for the Economic and Environmental Forum will be of a constructive nature, aimed at reviving the unifying potential of the second "basket".

We believe that promising areas for discussion would include anti-corruption efforts; the improvement of energy efficiency and achieving the transition to cleaner energy sources; the development of trade and transport connectivity, also in the context of aligning integration processes in the OSCE area so as to establish a Greater Eurasian Partnership; and the intensification of dialogue and co-operation on overcoming the negative effects of climate change. It is also necessary to discuss the destructive impact of the unilateral restrictive measures introduced by several Western States on the European and global economy and on the prospects for further economic co-operation in the OSCE area.

In view of last year's fiasco, we call upon North Macedonia to go about the task of organizing the work in the human dimension with the utmost responsibility. It is extremely important to begin reaching agreement in good time on the package of human dimension events for 2023. Another pressing matter is to relocate these to countries where different points of view are treated with respect and where the ethos of diplomacy is honoured.

The threat of neo-Nazism requires separate consideration and should be clearly reflected in the agenda of human dimension events. The problem of discrimination against the Russian and Russian-speaking population must not be ignored; the same goes for social and economic rights, and the protection of the linguistic and educational rights of national minorities and communities. Countering intolerance on religious grounds, insults to religious feelings, incitement to interreligious hatred and interference in ecclesiastical affairs must remain among the priorities. The tasking from the 2014 OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in Basel with regard to drafting Ministerial Council declarations on combating Christianophobia and Islamophobia has lost none of its relevance. Attention needs to be paid to freedom of

movement, children's rights, the situation of migrants, the elimination of statelessness, non-interference in private and family life, and discrimination in sport. And likewise to combating trafficking in human beings, including for the purposes of sexual exploitation or the removal of human organs, tissues and cells.

Given the worldwide censoring of the information space and online resources recently orchestrated by the authorities of the collective West, compliance with existing international commitments in the fields of freedom of speech and the media and free access to information is particularly important. It is unacceptable to restrict, under spurious political pretexts, the rights of journalists and to discriminate against them on ethnic grounds or for defending alternative points of view. The unchecked segregation on the World Wide Web, imposed by private big tech companies on the basis of some sort of "terms of service", also calls for separate attention.

In view of the persistent inconsistencies and double standards of the election observation methodology of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, there continues to be a need to work together on developing uniform rules for observing electoral processes in the OSCE area.

In closing, I should like to express the hope that North Macedonia's Chairmanship will not come to symbolize missed opportunities. You have in your hands, Minister, a unique tool for multilateral diplomacy that was created over several decades. The price of not using it effectively – and all the more so of misusing its mechanisms – could prove to be very high indeed: the OSCE would continue to fall by the wayside and its relevance would hit rock bottom.

Thank you for your attention.