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**STATEMENT BY MR. DMITRY BALAKIN,  
DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE  
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1177th MEETING OF THE  
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

1 March 2018

**In response to the report by the Head of the OSCE Mission to Montenegro**

Mr. Chairperson,

We listened to this report by the Head of the OSCE Mission to Montenegro Ms. Daviet.

We take the view that the Mission, which represents the interests of all 57 OSCE participating States, and acts strictly in accordance with the collectively agreed mandate, should present in its reports an objective picture of the situation in the host country. Reports by the OSCE field operations have always been distinguished by their professional analysis and impartial presentation. Superficial and opportunist assessments and distortions should have no place. The use of non-consensus vocabulary is unacceptable. The Mission should follow a status-neutral approach when referring to Kosovo. We hope that the OSCE Mission to Montenegro will respect this principle in full.

In particular, we have taken note of the Mission's attempt to explain the Government's poor results on the reform track as being due to the opposition boycott of the Parliament's work rather than to the authorities' ineffectiveness. We believe that the task of any OSCE field operation is to encourage a genuinely inclusive political process in the country and not to lay the blame on any one side. Only an unbiased approach makes it possible to effectively fulfil one of the key tasks under the mandate – to "assist and promote the implementation of OSCE principles and commitments" in all three dimensions.

Excessive attention is being given to Montenegro's prospects for European integration. We understand that this is the Montenegrin Government's strategic goal but this is not a task covered by the OSCE field operation's mandate.

We think it absolutely unacceptable that the Mission be used to spread fake stories about the so-called "coup d'état" in Montenegro, and the alleged involvement of Russian officials in this incident. As far as we are aware, the Montenegrin authorities have not yet provided any convincing proof in this matter. The court proceedings have long since become a farce, and are being used by the authorities for purely opportunist political goals.

The Mission should take a more critical line regarding the overt disinformation used to justify Montenegro being drawn into NATO – a process which has ignored public opinion in the country. This is a clear case of NATO ignoring its own membership criteria. Podgorica's contribution to strengthening NATO's capability is zero. This is clear to all. Furthermore, we have long since seen little mass public support for this course. NATO has had to ignore its own rules and European democratic values.

A public opinion survey conducted by the non-governmental organization (NGO) Centre for Democracy and Human Rights, selectively quoted by the Mission, backs up this assessment. This survey was commissioned and paid for by the NATO Public Policy Division, but even so, its analysis shows that the country is divided practically half and half between supporters and opponents of NATO membership. Another survey, conducted by the US NGO International Republican Institute, which can hardly be suspected of pro-Russian sympathies, produced a similar result, with a slight majority of respondents (51 per cent) opposed to NATO membership. Set against this backdrop, the Mission's assertion that "NATO accession has ceased to be a divisive political issue" looks like a blatant distortion of the facts.

This same public opinion survey revealed a low level of public trust in government institutions and public broadcasting, and lack of attention given to women's and youth initiatives. The OSCE Mission to Montenegro has been working for many years now in these areas, but we have yet to see the tangible results of these efforts.

We hope that the Chairmanship and the OSCE Secretariat's Conflict Prevention Centre will continue to pay the closest attention to the work of the Mission to Montenegro with the aim of making it more professional, objective and impartial.

Thank you for your attention.