

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1197th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

11 October 2018

**In response to the report by Ambassador Jan Braathu,
Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo**

Mr. Chairperson,

We express our gratitude to Ambassador Jan Braathu for his detailed report on the activities of the field presence in Kosovo.

The events of recent months in this Serbian territory have confirmed the continued existence of underlying problems that pose a threat to the peace and prosperity of the entire Western Balkans region. Once again, we have seen that attempts to ignore the deep-seated tensions serve only to exacerbate the Kosovo crisis.

Kosovo Albanian separatists, sensing unconditional support from outside, are demonstrating a complete lack of interest in finding, together with the Serbian Government, a basis for settling the frozen conflict. The Kosovo authorities continue to focus on intimidating the Serbs in an attempt to squeeze them out of the territory by force.

On 29 September, there was yet another incident of a demonstrable incursion by Kosovo police special units into the Serb-populated areas in the north of the territory. This occurred despite an existing agreement between the Government of Serbia and the Kosovo authorities with the clear aim of exerting pressure on Serbia. In a similar scenario, in Kosovska Mitrovica on 26 March, heavily armed special forces officers attacked a peaceful assembly of regional Serbs and Marko Đurić, Director of the Kosovo and Metohija Office of the Serbian Government, was detained and escorted in handcuffs to Priština. It is also worth recalling the murder of the well-known Serbian politician Oliver Ivanović in Kosovska Mitrovica on 16 January. The Kosovo authorities, with the support of a number of OSCE participating States, refused to conduct an international (with the participation of Serbian investigators) investigation into that terrorist act. The search for the perpetrators of this crime is being obstructed in Kosovo.

We condemn the passive approach taken by the international presences deployed in the territory – the Kosovo Force and the European Union Rule of Law Mission. They have

held back from ensuring the security of the non-Albanian population of Kosovo, and have even covered up impunity in the territory. It is quite obvious that the policy of connivance with regard to the criminal irresponsibility of the Kosovo Albanian authorities may result in renewed bloodshed in Kosovo and destabilization in the Balkan region as a whole. The continued attempts by the authorities in Priština to establish by force control over the parts of the territory populated by Serbs is stirring up inter-ethnic tensions and undermining the international community's long-term efforts towards achieving a peaceful post-conflict settlement.

Unfortunately, there are increasing signs to this effect. The European Union's mediation in the dialogue between the Government of Serbia and the authorities in Priština has been discredited. The Kosovo authorities continue to sabotage the agreement on the creation of the Community of Serb Municipalities. We have not heard any response to this by the OSCE. Instead of pushing the Kosovo Albanians to fulfil their obligations, there is growing pressure on the Serbian Government to recognize Kosovo's *de facto* independence. Attempts are being made to link the final normalization of relations between the Government of Serbia and the Kosovo authorities to certain artificial deadlines.

There has been no progress in the work by the Kosovo Special Court in The Hague to investigate the crimes committed by the Kosovo Liberation Army. The perpetrators of horrendous crimes, such as trafficking in human organs, have not received the punishment they deserve.

In violation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244, preparations are under way for the transformation of the current Kosovo security forces into a fully fledged army in the closed territory of the United States military base Camp Bondsteel.

As recent history has shown, attempting to move away from the agreed basis for the Kosovo settlement and encouraging the authorities in Priština to create a quasi-State will not lead to the resolution of the conflict in Kosovo, but, on the contrary, will only help to maintain a hotbed of contradictions in the Western Balkans.

In the extremely difficult conditions that remain in Kosovo, the importance of the impartial and neutral work of the OSCE Mission is growing. A key mandated task remains that of safeguarding the rights of non-Albanians, with a focus on the most vulnerable Serbian population.

We are compelled to note that the aggressive rhetoric of the Kosovo Albanian leadership against the central authorities in Belgrade reinforces the atmosphere of permissiveness and impunity for crimes against the Serbs in the territory. Attacks and physical threats against them, cases of theft and damage to their property, coercion to sell real estate, and expulsion by force from Kosovo are still commonplace. Of particular concern are the increasing illegal acts against Serbian children and young people in the south of the territory. The OSCE Mission must immediately respond to all such manifestations and seek punishment from the Kosovo authorities for the perpetrators. The task of the OSCE field presence is not only to help create the necessary institutional and legal guarantees for the political, social, linguistic, cultural and religious rights of the non-Albanian population, but also to ensure the implementation of laws in practice.

We consider the statistics on the number of Serbs that have returned to their homes after being expelled from the territory to be a real indicator of the effectiveness of legal guarantees for the Serbian population. The OSCE Mission's data on the repatriation of only 34 Serbs since the beginning of this year indicates a depressing situation in that regard.

We note the OSCE Mission's role in preventing the start of illegal construction on the territory of the special protective zone of the Visoki Dečani monastery, which is on the UNESCO List of World Heritage in Danger. We expect the OSCE field presence to give priority attention to preserving the sites of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo and ensuring the safety of pilgrims.

Action needs to be taken to combat the problem of religious extremism and terrorism in the territory, which has been exacerbated by the return of Islamic State militants to Kosovo. According to reports, around half of the approximately 400 citizens who fought in its ranks in Syria and Iraq have returned.

We are counting on the OSCE Mission to step up its work in combating drug trafficking and the arms trade. It is quite obvious that without initiative from the Kosovo authorities, it is unlikely that these problems will be addressed.

We are convinced that the continuation of multilateral efforts to create a truly tolerant society in Kosovo with reliable guarantees for the security and rights of the non-Albanian population will ultimately contribute to creating conditions for the settlement of the Kosovo conflict. The role of the OSCE Mission in this is beyond doubt.

The Russian position on Kosovo remains unchanged. The settlement of the Kosovo conflict will be possible only on the basis of UN Security Council resolution 1244 and with the Security Council playing a key role. All parties must act in strict accordance with their mandates to ensure peace and stability in the territory.

Mr. Chairperson,

We are disappointed by the decision of the Italian OSCE Chairmanship to invite representatives of the Kosovo authorities to an informal meeting with the Head of the Mission in Kosovo in Vienna on 10 October. Such a move is in gross violation of UN Security Council resolution 1244. The departure from the status-neutral position goes against the decision of the OSCE Ministerial Council in Porto in 2002 on the role of the OSCE Chairmanship-in-Office and undermines the Italian Chairmanship's reputation as an honest broker.

Moreover, we consider the ill-founded overtures towards the Kosovo Albanians to be a new manifestation of the "double standards" policy. If the invitation of representatives of the Kosovo interim administration was aimed at receiving "first-hand" an assessment of the effectiveness of OSCE assistance, it is not clear why Transdnistrians, South Ossetians, Abkhazians and representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk are deprived of the same right. I should like the OSCE Chairmanship's approach to be more consistent.

In conclusion, we should like to wish Ambassador Jan Braathu and his team continued success in their work.

Thank you for your attention.