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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1220th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

14 March 2019

In response to the report by the Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia

Mr. Chairperson,

We thank the Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, Ambassador Andrea Orizio, for his detailed report on the field presence's activities.

Russia is interested in the stable, progressive development of the Western Balkans and in strengthening the conditions of peace and stability in the region necessary for this. We have made our own considerable contribution to the achievement of this goal, notably through the implementation of joint large-scale investment infrastructure projects with Serbia.

The report demonstrates the Serbian Government's significant achievements as regards its national development priorities. The country's economy is growing rapidly. Serbia is pursuing a pragmatic foreign policy and is taking a responsible approach to building regional ties with neighbouring States.

Constant attention is being given to improving governance institutions and domestic legislation. Serbia has all the components for independent development. At the same time, there is also demand for the support of national plans from the OSCE Mission. We believe that this best illustrates the effectiveness of the field presence, whose activities are generally developed in a balanced manner.

We consider the Mission's contribution to the strengthening of Serbia's law enforcement capabilities in the fight against organized crime, money laundering and financing of criminal activities, corruption and trafficking in human beings, and to the development of national forensic expertise to be particularly significant. As noted in the report, for our part, we are assisting the Serbian Government in this area in co-operation with the Mission. We believe that this experience could also be relevant to the neighbouring States of the Western Balkans.

We note the Serbian Government's interest in the OSCE field presence's assistance in introducing best practices for regulating media activities, supporting judicial reform, strengthening local self-government and protecting the rights of national minorities. We are seeing progress in the efforts to address the issue of refugees and internally displaced persons.

We consider the attention given in the report to the development of the situation in Kosovo and Metohija to be justified. The authorities in Priština are clearly following the path towards escalation of the conflict and are taking provocative steps. Illegal duties on goods from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina have not yet been abolished. In violation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244, the process of creating a so-called army of Kosovo has been initiated. The parade of the Kosovo Security Forces with the participation of the Kosovo elite on 5 March – the anniversary of the killing of one of the leaders of the Kosovo Liberation Army – left no doubt that the future “armed forces” are based on the pseudo-ideals of this terrorist group, which was responsible for the deaths of thousands of Serbs and Albanians. Unfortunately, in the West, they prefer not to notice the provocations of the Kosovo authorities. Such myopia is dangerous in the face of fresh turmoil in the Western Balkans and in Europe as a whole.

On 7 March, the so-called parliament of Kosovo adopted a “law” establishing a negotiating position in the dialogue with the Serbian Government. The document excludes the possibility of a compromise in the Kosovo settlement. It is obvious that the patrons of Kosovo – the United States of America and the European Union – must exert their influence over the Kosovo authorities in order to change the current course.

We note against this background the restraint shown by the Serbian Government, which is in fact interested in bringing the Kosovo settlement out of the present impasse.

In conclusion, we should like to once again thank Ambassador Orizio for his report and to wish the Head of the Mission and his team continued success in their work.

Thank you for your attention.