

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1132nd MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

2 February 2017

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

Mr. Chairperson,

We are pleased to welcome the Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, Ambassador Jan Braathu, who is here to present his first report to the OSCE Permanent Council. We wish you every success in this important and responsible position, especially in view of the scale of the problems that persist in the Serbian autonomous territory of Kosovo and Metohija.

The recent incident involving the Belgrade-Kosovska Mitrovica train once again graphically demonstrated how fragile the situation in the region is. Only the level-headed decision taken by the Serbian authorities in ordering the train to return to the capital made it possible to avoid a situation in which events escalated into a conflict, a scenario that had been provoked by Priština sending heavily armed special police units into Serb-populated northern Kosovo. We should like to point out that this contravened the European Union-brokered agreements between Belgrade and Priština on the inadmissibility of a Kosovar security force presence in Serb-populated areas without the consent of the international military presence established in the territory on the basis of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244.

This topic once again shows the danger of trying to depict the Kosovo reality in a rosy light. This kind of approach risks losing the reference points for external assistance, which should be focused on creating a safe and democratic society in the territory where the rights of all inhabitants, regardless of their ethnicity or religious belief, would be equally respected and guaranteed, conditions created for the return of the non-Albanian population that had been expelled from the territory, and their property rights and the opportunity to live in accordance with their historical, cultural and religious traditions restored.

The Serb population remains the most vulnerable. It has not been possible to safeguard their political, linguistic, cultural or religious rights. Discrimination persists in areas such as education, health care, employment and the media, and freedom of movement is restricted. Serbs remain the main target of manifestations of intolerance and crimes with an

ethnic or religious motive. In addition to the incidents referred to in the report, including the scandalous robbery for a seventh time of an elderly Serb woman living in the Klina municipality, it is worth mentioning yet another attack on 6 January on a bus taking pilgrims to Đakovica and on 12 January on buses carrying Serb students along the Šilovo-Koretište road. The absence of an appropriate response to these incidents on the part of the Kosovo police not only instils into the attackers the feeling that they can get away with anything but also actually undermines the OSCE Mission's long-standing efforts to strengthen police capacity. We look forward to a prompt and objective assessment from the OSCE Mission in Kosovo of each such incident.

Their vulnerability combined with the radicals' impunity is preventing Serbs from returning to their homes. No matter how much anyone might want to rule out this possibility, they should understand that without the return of the refugees and internally displaced persons and the restoration of their rights a lasting reconciliation is scarcely achievable. Alongside the projects already being implemented to promote inter-ethnic dialogue, the OSCE Mission needs to pay the closest attention to this problem.

Things are no better as regards guarantees for the religious rights of the non-Albanian population. One has the impression from the situation regarding the Church of Christ the Saviour in Priština and the Church of St. Nicholas in Prizren that preventing their operation has been elevated to an official policy of the Kosovo authorities. Against this background, it comes as no surprise that many other churches and monasteries belonging to the Serbian Orthodox Church are regularly attacked and desecrated by Kosovo Albanian radicals.

The Kosovo authorities are simply unable to restrain them; they condone and at times even help incite hatred themselves. Just take the blatantly nationalistic false stories referring to the Albanian-populated districts of southern Serbia as "Eastern Kosovo" in a press release by the self-appointed prime minister Isa Mustafa or the calls by the representatives of the territory's authorities and the opposition in favour of uniting Albanian lands, including those within the territory of Serbia, Macedonia, Greece and Montenegro and creating a "Greater Albania" there. This kind of rhetoric is extremely dangerous and deserves an appropriate international response, first and foremost on the part of the OSCE.

We look forward to positive results from the resumed EU-brokered political dialogue between Belgrade and Priština, which we hope will stabilize the situation in the territory. We note with regret that the Kosovo authorities continue to drag out the implementation of or sabotage altogether the agreements reached earlier, including the key agreement providing for the establishment of the Community of Serb Municipalities in Kosovo. We urge the EU, which assumed a mediating role in line with the UN General Assembly resolution of 9 September 2010, to implement its commitments in good faith and in an impartial manner to ensure that Priština clearly adheres to the agreements reached.

We trust that the appointment of the chief prosecutor will accelerate the work of the specialist court in The Hague to investigate serious crimes committed by the Kosovo Liberation Army. The unjustified delay in the investigations could enable potential defendants to hide their tracks and avoid responsibility. There are conflicting signals at the moment. For example, on 30 December 2016, the so-called Supreme Court of Kosovo ordered a retrial of doctors and officials convicted by the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) of involvement in illegal organ transplants. We hope that the investigations will be completed and that all the guilty parties will receive the punishment

they deserve regardless of their status or the political climate in the territory. We have noted the declared willingness of the Kosovo authorities to investigate high-profile post-war crimes such as the murder of 14 Kosovo Serbs in the village of Staro Gracko and 2 Serb teenagers in Goraždevac. We shall judge Priština's actions on the basis of the concrete results of this work.

I repeat that for now the situation in Kosovo and Metohija remains far from stable and predictable, and the territory's government institutions are not up to the task. This leads to the unpleasant conclusion that the efforts of the international community, including the OSCE, have been futile. The focus on promoting institution-building is not paying off and needs to be modified. We are impressed by Ambassador Braathu's intention to step up the Mission's work aimed at achieving a real breakthrough in the protection of the non-Albanian population's rights. The OSCE Mission should continue its work in full and in accordance with UN Security Council resolution 1244, which remains the international legal basis for a Kosovo settlement that is binding for all, on the basis of the key task of promoting inter-ethnic reconciliation and mutual respect, and the establishment within the territory of a viable multi-ethnic society where the rights of each and every citizen are fully and equally respected.

Against this background, the proposals regarding some kind of presence of Kosovo representatives at OSCE thematic events are surprising. In accordance with the Rules of Procedure of the OSCE and in view of the status of Kosovo and Metohija as an autonomous territory within Serbia, representatives of Priština may be present in this room only as part of the Serbian delegation.

In conclusion, we should like to join in thanking Ambassador Jan Braathu and wish him and the Mission staff every success in their difficult task.

Thank you for your attention.