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PC.DEL/857/19
11 July 2019

ENGLISH
Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1235th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

11 July 2019

On the report by the Head of the OSCE Mission to Skopje

Mr. Chairperson,

We are pleased to welcome our distinguished colleague Ambassador Clemens Koja to familiar surroundings and thank him for his informative and balanced report on the Mission's activities. We are confident that an unbiased approach to the events in North Macedonia is key to the effectiveness of the field presence.

We attach great importance to the harmonious development of the Western Balkans as a whole and of each State of the region in particular. In this context, we consider it useful for the OSCE to continue to provide comprehensive assistance to the authorities of North Macedonia in addressing the pressing issues of national and regional significance. We hope that such assistance will continue to be provided within the framework of the existing mandate, in close co-operation with the host country.

The field presence's efforts to assist the State structures of North Macedonia in ensuring the rule of law, improving the work of law enforcement agencies and reforming the judicial system remain relevant. There is particular demand for practical assistance to local law enforcement agencies in enhancing their capacity to combat organized crime and cybercrime, terrorism, extremism, trafficking in human beings, and also illicit trafficking in arms and drugs. We urge the Mission not to reduce the level of attention given to these tasks.

We hope that the Mission will continue to consistently promote efforts to reduce inter-ethnic tensions and ensure equal rights of ethnic communities in full accordance with the key objectives, namely, the promotion of the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, the harmonization of inter-ethnic relations and the strengthening of mutual understanding between communities as the basis for preserving peace and stability in the country.

We are convinced that the OSCE Mission to Skopje, together with the Organization's field presences in neighbouring States, should continue to focus, in particular, on strengthening regional co-operation. Enhancing the level of co-operation among the specialized agencies will be of great help in addressing the most pressing issues for the Balkan region as a whole.

We trust that the Mission will follow a balanced and politically neutral approach in its work on the aforementioned areas and on the other mandated areas relevant to the host State.

We wish Ambassador Koja and the staff of the OSCE Mission to Skopje success in their activities. We hope that the Mission will contribute to the creation in the foreseeable future of the necessary conditions for the further independent development of the country and its prosperity.

Thank you for your attention.