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**STATEMENT BY
MR. MAXIM BUYAKEVICH, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1429th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

22 June 2023

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

Mr. Chairperson,

We thank the distinguished Ambassador Jan Braathu for his comprehensive report on the key events that took place in Serbia during the reporting period. Among the high-profile incidents were, unfortunately, the tragic shootings in early May, which resulted in the loss of life. We express our sincere condolences to the families of those killed and wish a speedy recovery to all those who were injured.

After presidential and early parliamentary elections on 3 April 2022, a Government of Serbia was formed in October 2022. The Cabinet of Ministers included representatives of various national minorities, reflecting the desire of the Serbian authorities to pursue a balanced domestic policy that takes into account the interests of all citizens. The conclusion of the report by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) on these elections is not surprising: concepts such as impartiality and objectivity have long since vanished from the Office's working practices. Nevertheless, in March this year, the Serbian Government formed a working group on co-operation with the OSCE and the ODIHR to co-ordinate the implementation of recommendations to improve the electoral process.

The attempt by the Kosovo authorities to hold farcical local elections in selected municipalities of Kosovo and Metohija has caused an increase in tensions and once again put regional stability at risk. At the Permanent Council meetings on 4 May and 1 June, we gave an assessment of the pseudo-elections themselves and the escalation that followed. Let us not go over it again. With regard to the Kosovo question, the position of the Russian Federation remains unchanged: the international legal basis for a settlement is United Nations Security Council resolution 1244. It is on the basis of this document that a solution must be found, which must have the approval of the Security Council. And again: all efforts of the international mediators are doomed to failure until the Kosovo authorities finally honour the commitments they have undertaken, which include the creation of the Community of Serb Municipalities.

The report by the OSCE Mission to Serbia offers a good overview of the regional context. However, we wonder why it includes a section mentioning Ukraine. It has nothing to do with the Western Balkans or the work of the Mission itself. We would ask that this point be taken into account.

Regarding the Mission's programmatic activities, the field operation has traditionally focused on media issues and the safety of journalists. The fact that the report indicates that the media landscape is highly polarized is worrying. At the same time, progress is visible: according to the Serbian Public Prosecutor's Office, fewer threats against journalists were registered between January and March 2023 than in the same period in 2022.

We commend the Mission's educational and awareness-raising focus. The numerous workshops, training courses, round tables and seminars on issues of importance to the host State authorities help to create a sustainable, positive dynamic. However, the Mission also rightly attaches great importance to key issues in the region as a whole, such as countering corruption and money laundering, organized crime and transnational threats, as well as migration and the rights of national minorities. We trust that the field operation will continue to focus on these aspects.

In conclusion, we should like to wish the distinguished Ambassador Braathu and the entire Mission team the best of health and every success in their work.

Thank you for your attention.