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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE
1325th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

22 July 2021

On the international conference on regional connectivity in Central and South Asia

Mr. Chairperson,

We thank the distinguished Ambassador of the Republic of Uzbekistan for the information provided on the international conference “Central and South Asia: Regional Connectivity – Challenges and Opportunities” that was held in Tashkent on 15 and 16 July.

There was an instructive discussion on important topics related to international and regional agendas, how to ensure strategic stability, and integration processes involving Central and South Asian States; it covered, *inter alia*, economic co-operation and collaboration in such fields as investment, energy, technological innovation, and the development and exploitation of the transit and logistics potential of the two regions.

We wish to point out that, on the margins of this event, a meeting was held in Tashkent on 16 July between the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Sergey Lavrov, and the foreign policy chiefs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Republic of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan, following which a joint statement was adopted. The focus was on security in the region – above all, in the light of the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan.

We have already discussed with you today the importance of participating States’ co-operation with the Asian Partners on the full range of issues pertaining to comprehensive security. The crisis in Afghanistan is aggravating the terrorist threat and the problem of illicit drug trafficking, which has reached an unprecedented level. It is evident that, in the current circumstances, there is a real risk of instability spilling over into neighbouring States. Unfortunately, the danger posed by such a scenario constitutes a serious obstacle on the path of involving Afghanistan in regional co-operation.

We acknowledge the importance of carrying on with initiatives aimed at supporting the re-establishment of Afghanistan’s socio-economic structure and the integration of that country into regional economic processes. However, we believe that such plans should fully take into account the security situation on the ground. It is only through a comprehensive settlement of the internal conflict in Afghanistan that one can count on the successful implementation of economic projects involving the Afghan

Government. That is why achieving lasting peace in Afghanistan should, in our view, remain the foremost priority of collective efforts both in the region itself and at the international level.

We reaffirm the interest of Russia in facilitating dialogue between the Afghan belligerents with a view to ending a war that has gone on for so many years and enabling Afghanistan to become a peaceful, independent and neutral State. We are of the view that only direct and inclusive inter-Afghan negotiations, assisted by international partners, can lead to the establishment of long-term peace.

Thank you for your attention.