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**STATEMENT BY
MR. ANDREY KELIN, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1039th MEETING OF
THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

12 February 2015

In response to the report by the Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo

Mr. Chairperson,

We are pleased to welcome Ambassador Jean-Claude Schlumberger, Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, to this meeting of the Permanent Council. We appreciate the multifaceted work of this field presence. It is important for it to continue to act in a status-neutral manner in strict compliance with United Nations Security Council resolution 1244, which remains the universally binding international legal basis for a Kosovo settlement.

We are concerned at the significant ongoing problems in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija, primarily in the area of inter-ethnic relations and the situation of non-Albanian communities and individuals. On 25 and 27 January, anti-government demonstrations by the opposition in Priština escalated into mass unrest and clashes with police, and dozens of people were injured. This is a clear reminder of the fragility of the political stability in the territory. This was once again under threat when, under pressure from radical nationalists, the Kosovo leadership dismissed Aleksandar Jablanović, an ethnic Serb, who was the Minister of Communities and Returns. He had dared to condemn the incident on 6 January in Đakovica, where stones were thrown at a bus carrying Serbian pilgrims and refugees from that city.

We regard the high-level political dialogue between Belgrade and Priština under the aegis of the European Union as the main instrument for the peaceful political resolution of contentious issues, the creation of the prerequisites for improving the living conditions of the people of Kosovo and stabilizing the situation in the Balkans as a whole. We commend the resumption of the dialogue on 9 February. As is well known, the pause in the negotiations was caused by a protracted political vacuum in Priština due to the inability of the key parties to form a government independently without external intervention. This showed once again that there are serious problems hidden behind the “façade” of Kosovo’s Provisional Institutions of Self-Government.

We welcome Belgrade’s constructive attitude and constant willingness for dialogue with Kosovo Albanian representatives. We hope that a substantive dialogue on an equal

footing between Belgrade and Priština will allow progress to be made in resolving the key task of establishing a Community of Serb Municipalities in Kosovo and giving it real powers. The failure to implement the agreement on this, which was reached in April 2013, is having a negative impact on the collaboration between the Kosovo communities. It is impossible to reduce inter-ethnic tension unless a dialogue of mutual respect develops between them. As a matter of urgency, the fuelling of anti-Serb sentiment in Kosovo should be stopped, and those guilty of illegal acts should be brought to justice, particularly the perpetrators of such acts as the desecration of Orthodox monasteries in the territory, including the world heritage cultural gem, Visoki Dečani Monastery.

All this underscores the fact that the OSCE Mission should continue to focus its attention on safeguarding the rights of non-Albanian communities. This is primarily a matter of ensuring their safety, restoring property rights, preserving the Serbian Orthodox and cultural heritage, and ensuring freedom of movement and non-discrimination with regard to language policy, education, health care, employment and the media. The conditions necessary for the return to the territory of over 230,000 Serbian internally displaced persons are still not in place. Less than 2 per cent of them have returned. What is more, there is a growing outflow of representatives of non-Albanian minorities from the territory. The mere existence of legislation that guarantees the rights of minorities is not enough – it must be rigorously observed.

The lack of progress in other areas, including socio-economic ones, is also obvious to us. The unemployment rate is very high, and people are leaving Kosovo en masse in search of a better life. The high crime rate has not been reduced, and the problems associated with the high level of corruption, limiting political influence on the judicial system and illegal trafficking in arms and narcotics have not been eliminated. There is a need for thorough investigation of cases of trafficking in human organs.

Against this background, the Mission's work on strengthening the potential of the Kosovo police is particularly important. We share Serbia's view regarding the need to establish a special court to investigate the heinous crimes of the Kosovo Liberation Army during the years of armed conflict. The provisional results of the investigation that have been published indicate that the evidence gathered is sufficient for charges to be brought for multiple murders, abductions, rapes, illegal detention, inhumane treatment, trafficking in human organs and desecration of churches. It was these crimes that led to the mass exodus of Serbs from southern and central Kosovo, where, to all intents and purposes, ethnic cleansing took place. It is strange that the institution of the special court has turned out to be a hostage to the adoption of "legislative" decisions in Priština, particularly given the evident weakness of the political institutions of Kosovo. It is extremely important that all witnesses be given proper protection.

The OSCE Mission, like other international presences, should also pay particular attention to the unprecedented spread of radical and extremist ideas, which is exacerbating the already difficult situation in Kosovo and turning it into a breeding ground for recruiters from terrorist groups. The practice of resolutely preventing Kosovans from becoming involved in conflicts in the Middle East, including with the Islamic State militant group, should continue, and extremist ideas in the territory should be more actively countered, including through the application of legislation recently adopted in Kosovo.

Today's discussion in the Permanent Council once again confirms the need for strengthening rather than reducing the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, particularly with regard to the rule of law, including police training to deal with organized crime and transnational threats and challenges.

We wish Ambassador Schlumberger and his team further success in their difficult work.

Thank you for your attention.