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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE
1306th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL
VIA VIDEO TELECONFERENCE**

18 March 2021

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

Madam Chairperson,

We thank the distinguished Ambassador Jan Braathu for his comprehensive report and congratulate him on his appointment to this position of responsibility. We are convinced that your extensive experience in the region and your expert knowledge of the Western Balkans, Mr. Ambassador, will help to achieve practical results for the benefit of the Serbian people and in the interests of regional stability.

The report presented attests to the Serbian Government's significant achievements in a number of areas, even in the face of the pandemic. At the same time, in combating COVID-19, Serbia has demonstrated a truly depoliticized approach, which many Western colleagues could also do with taking a closer look at. Thanks to this, Serbia has become the second most vaccinated country in Europe per 100 people. Journalists have aptly referred to the country as a "vaccine paradise".

The recent parliamentary elections have confirmed the sufficient maturity of Serbia's electoral mechanisms, as also evidenced by the Mission's report.

Special mention should be made of the Serbian authorities' consistently tough stance in combating organized crime and criminality. Their determination and zero-tolerance approach to restoring order and ensuring the safety of citizens inspires respect. In this context, the activities undertaken, including with the Mission's assistance, to reform the police and increase the effectiveness of the fight against money laundering and corruption are very much in demand. Russia will continue to support its Serbian friends in training police in particularly critical areas, such as trafficking in human beings, drug trafficking and cybercrime.

Madam Chairperson,

The progress that we saw last year in the Belgrade-Priština dialogue came to nothing after the so-called parliamentary elections held recently in the Serbian Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija. The harsh rhetoric of the authorities in Priština, ultimatums and the demonstrative neglect of commitments undertaken, including those regarding the establishment of a Community of Serb

Municipalities in Kosovo, are not conducive to moving towards a settlement. Against this background, the calls from the US Government and a number of European capitals for Serbia to achieve “final normalization” as soon as possible are cynical. Despite the Kosovo authorities’ obvious sabotage of the negotiation process, the demands are for some reason directed only at the Serbian Government.

Russia’s position remains unchanged. We consider it unacceptable to impose any deadlines and to exert pressure on one party to the dialogue while openly indulging the other. The main thing now is to find a mutually acceptable and viable solution on the basis of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244.

We have noted the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament, which expresses concern about Serbia’s close political and military co-operation with Russia. At the same time, it recommends that Serbia continue to align its foreign policy with that of the European Union. In this connection, I should like to remind our colleagues in the European Parliament and all those who share this approach that imposing templates of political thinking on an independent State is, at the very least, unethical, and in the case of the Serbian people, counterproductive.

In conclusion, we should like to wish Ambassador Jan Braathu and his team good health and success in their work.

Thank you for your attention.