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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE
1304th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL
VIA VIDEO TELECONFERENCE**

4 March 2021

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

Madam Chairperson,

We thank the distinguished Mr. Kilian Wahl for his report on the situation in the Serbian Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija and the results of the activities of the OSCE Mission there. We trust that Ambassador Michael Davenport, the newly appointed Head of the Mission, will carry out his mandate impartially and professionally in the interests of all peoples living in the province.

Allow me to emphasize – “all peoples”. The results of the so-called parliamentary elections in February offer little room for optimism, including where this issue is concerned. The ultra-nationalist Self-Determination movement led by Albin Kurti, which won the majority of votes, is at this stage demonstrating anything but a desire for mutually respectful dialogue with national minorities. The facts presented in the report also attest to that. In particular, the growing number of incidents involving the province’s Serbian population cannot but cause concern.

We have taken note of the false reports of alleged attempts to hold a repeat vote in the Serb-populated north of Kosovo. As it became apparent in the course of the investigations, these reports were not confirmed. At the same time, the attempts by the Kosovo authorities to undermine the electoral base of the province’s Serbian population by removing them from registration lists, redrawing the districts, changing the composition of the “election commissions” and other anti-Serbian provocations have not gone unnoticed.

The situation regarding Orthodox artefacts, which require constant protection from Kosovo Albanian usurper attacks, remains worrying. We are outraged at the connivance of the local “authorities”, who turn a blind eye to cases of desecration of graves and looting and destruction of cultural and religious heritage sites.

The Kosovo authorities’ toughening rhetoric with regard to dialogue with the Serbian Government is also cause for concern. Mr. Kurti, who has aspirations to become “Prime Minister”, has declared the issue to be of marginal importance. Moreover, he has issued an ultimatum, calling for a focus on the “only acceptable” option – prompt recognition of Kosovo’s “independence” by Serbia. He has also discussed the

prospects for unification with Albania. Against this backdrop, his demands for the European Union to establish a specific timetable for the simultaneous admission of all Western Balkan States into the European Union are particularly provocative.

There is something else that is surprising, however. The Kosovans' arrogant antics are no longer having an effect – the almost total lack of reaction by their Western patrons to such utterances is bewildering. It is unlikely that the joint statement by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, and the European Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, Olivér Várhelyi, of 15 February, which expressed hope that the authorities in Priština would engage in constructive dialogue with the Serbian Government, will encourage the so-called Kosovo government to change its stance.

Moreover, such flirting with the Kosovo Albanian radicals while at the same time increasing pressure on the Serbian Government, and calls from the United States Government and the European Union for the prompt “final normalization” of relations, could stall the entire settlement process.

We believe that it is counterproductive to impose any deadline on this issue. The core task is to reach a sustainable, viable and mutually acceptable solution, which must be in accordance with international law, be based on United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 and receive the Council's approval. At this stage, however, it is necessary to concentrate on implementing the commitments already made by the parties. Key among them is the creation of a Community of Serb Municipalities in Kosovo. We should remind you that the Kosovo authorities have been sabotaging this process since 2013.

We note the start of hearings at the special court established in The Hague to investigate the crimes of the Kosovo Liberation Army in relation to four of its former leaders. All perpetrators should receive the punishment they deserve, regardless of their position. We consider any attempts to exert pressure on the court to be absolutely unacceptable.

We are grateful to the Mission for its careful attention to ensuring the political, social, religious and linguistic rights of the non-Albanian population in Kosovo, and to helping protect their property rights, preserve their cultural heritage and return refugees and internally displaced persons. All of those issues must remain a priority for the field presence's work.

However, the European Commission's October 2020 report on Kosovo noted the Kosovo authorities' very limited progress on reforms, highlighting problems related to corruption, organized crime and freedom of speech. In other words, precisely those areas on which the OSCE Mission is also called upon to focus its attention in accordance with its mandate, and this for more than 20 years now. So there is still a lot of work to be done.

In that connection, I should like to wish the distinguished Ambassador Davenport and his team every success in carrying out the tasks entrusted to the Mission.

Thank you for your attention.