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**STATEMENT BY
MR. ANDREY KELIN, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1041st MEETING OF
THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

26 February 2015

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

Mr. Chairperson,

We welcome Ambassador Peter Burkhard, Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, to the Permanent Council meeting and thank him for his informative report.

We share his positive assessment of the stable internal situation and the consistent efforts of the Serbian Government in implementing reforms. We note Belgrade's constructive role in strengthening stability and security in the Balkans.

We take a positive view of the Mission's work. We support its efforts – in accordance with the wishes of the host authorities and in close co-ordination with them – to assist the Serbian Government in implementing legislative and judicial reforms, developing democratic institutions and local self-government and protecting the rights of national minorities. We believe that Belgrade's experience with expanding the powers of local government bodies and ensuring the cultural, religious and linguistic rights of national minorities could be applied in other countries that have suffered as a result of major internal political crises. We support the Mission's work on implementing a housing programme for refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs).

We note the Mission's contribution to improving the Serbian law enforcement system and countering corruption. We trust that these efforts will lead to a significant increase in the potential of the bodies responsible for ensuring legality and public order, thus helping to boost public confidence in them. At the same time, we cannot fail to be concerned at the reports of large-scale recruiting of militants for Islamic State in certain areas of Serbia. Together with reports on the use of the Balkans by international organized crime for trafficking in narcotics, illicit trafficking in human beings, weapons and counterfeit goods, this is evidence in favour of developing co-operation between the Mission and Serbian law enforcement bodies in order to develop their potential.

We understand that the Mission's activities in southern and south-western Serbia are closely co-ordinated with the Serbian central authorities and take place purely at their request

and on the basis of ensuring real equal rights and opportunities for the citizens of the country, regardless of their belonging to ethnic minorities or the majority.

We trust that the active assistance of the Mission in implementing one of the key priorities of the Serbian Chairmanship of the OSCE – the development of regional co-operation – will continue. The combined efforts of all the OSCE field presences in the region are required to effectively resolve the problems in the Balkans. We are referring first and foremost to the region-wide tasks of combating transborder organized crime, facilitating the return of refugees and IDPs and assisting in dealing with the consequences of natural and man-made disasters.

The Russian Federation continues to support international efforts to strengthen regional co-operation in the Balkans. We would like to mention just one example. The establishment of the Russian-Serbian humanitarian centre in Niš is a useful contribution by our country to the development of collaboration between the regional States on dealing with the consequences of natural and man-made disasters. We are confident that the centre is quite capable of becoming a useful platform for constructive collaboration by all the Balkan States on solving this problem which they all face. We also look forward to close co-operation between the centre and the OSCE field presences in the Balkans.

In conclusion, we should like to join in wishing Ambassador Burkhard and his team further success in their challenging work.

Thank you for your attention.