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PC.DEL/306/25/Corr.1
28 March 2025

ENGLISH
Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY
MR. MAXIM BUYAKEVICH, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1514th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

27 March 2025

On the anniversary of NATO's aggression against Yugoslavia

Mr. Chairperson,

Twenty-six years ago, on 24 March 1999, in violation of the Charter of the United Nations, the Helsinki Final Act and the universally recognized norms and principles of international law, the armed forces of the member States of the North Atlantic Alliance carried out an unprovoked act of aggression against Yugoslavia. The NATO bombing lasted 78 days and caused severe damage to the country's economic potential and environment, bringing suffering and grief to its people.

During the so-called Allied Force air operation, 3,000 cruise missiles were launched at the country's territory and 80,000 tonnes of various munitions were dropped, including 10 tonnes of depleted uranium. As a result of the air strikes, over 2,500 civilians were killed and more than 12,000 people were injured. Industrial plants, transport infrastructure, medical facilities and educational institutions were destroyed. The contamination of the environment with radioactive elements triggered a surge in cancer cases. One of the most serious consequences of the bombing was the exodus of refugees to neighbouring countries – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Croatia. In all, up to 50 per cent of the Serbian population abandoned their homes during the aggression and never returned to their native hearth and home.

Back then, the initiators of the crusade against Yugoslavia (and, essentially, against the Serbian part of its population) openly declared at a meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council that the violation of all of the Organization's principles and its binding acts was justified on humanitarian grounds. At the same time, the representatives of other participating States present in the room effectively supported the bloody adventure of those who placed themselves above the interests of the continent's security and the norms of international law through their tacit consent. The lack of a proper response from the OSCE dealt a severe blow to its credibility, ultimately triggering an identity crisis within the Organization.

Let me remind you that the formal pretext for NATO's so-called humanitarian intervention was the events in the village of Račak in January 1999, which the Head of the OSCE Mission, William Walker, in violation of his mandate and long before the investigation was completed, called a crime against humanity, attributing all responsibility for what happened to Serbia. The truth about what took place in Račak has not yet been revealed: the materials of the independent investigation conducted by Finnish forensic medical

experts have not been made public. Moreover, after the materials were submitted to the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, they completely “disappeared”. In the same year, 1999, the leadership of the North Atlantic Alliance publicly admitted that preparations for the operation had begun no later than June 1998, that is, long before the events that apparently served as nothing more than a convenient pretext for its launch.

Subsequently, the main focus of the Western countries’ efforts within the framework of the Kosovo settlement became justifying NATO’s actions and encouraging Kosovo Albanian extremism. Pressure of all kinds was exerted on the province’s Serbian population, including pogroms, infringement of rights, isolation in enclaves, and the destruction of Orthodox sites located there.

The unilateral declaration of Kosovo’s independence in defiance of United Nations Security Council decisions did nothing to improve the situation with regard to the rule of law and respect for human rights, but merely opened a new chapter of lawlessness. The persecution of the province’s non-Albanian population has not stopped. As a result of the targeted policy of the so-called authorities of the self-proclaimed republic, 10 per cent of the Serbian population left the province in 2023 alone. But apparently, even this rate of Serbian exodus is not considered satisfactory in Pristina. In February of this year, the Kosovo police raided Belgrade-funded social welfare centres, apparently with the aim of blocking their work, thereby fuelling the emerging migration trends.

In this context, we believe that the Serbian efforts to preserve the memory of the victims of the 1999 tragedy and to stop attempts to rewrite the history of the Yugoslav crisis are more relevant than ever. The Russian Federation, for its part, will continue to provide Serbia with the necessary support in this endeavour. It is important to learn the bitter lesson of history, to prevent the repetition of tragic events and to ensure the protection of the rights of the Serbian people both in Kosovo and in other regions where they live.

Thank you for your attention.