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**STATEMENT BY
MR. ALEKSANDR VOLGAREV, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1416th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

23 March 2023

On the 24th anniversary of NATO's aggression against the sovereign State Yugoslavia

Mr. Chairperson,

On 24 March 1999, the United States of America and its NATO allies unleashed an armed aggression against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. For 78 days and nights, the United States and an additional 18 countries engaged in carpet bombing of targets on Serbian territory, including residential areas, hospitals and civilian infrastructure facilities, broadcasting facilities, and oil refineries, storage tanks and pipelines. In total, the Alliance's forces released over 10,000 tonnes of explosives, which, converted to a TNT equivalent, is five times greater than the destructive power of the atom bomb dropped over Hiroshima in 1945 by, again, the Americans. All in all, in the course of the military operation, NATO flew 38,000 sorties using combat aircraft, launched 2,300 missiles and dropped 14,000 bombs, including depleted uranium ordnance. In 2002, the United Nations confirmed radioactive contamination in Kosovo as a result of these bombing attacks.

Around 2,500 people were killed in that criminal adventure, more than 12,000 were injured. Data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees indicates that, during the aggression, up to 50 per cent of the Serb population of the territory of Kosovo abandoned their homes.

It may not be evident to everyone in this room, so I will remind you that the US-led onslaught by NATO on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was an egregious violation of international law, to wit, the fundamental objectives and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the CSCE Helsinki Final Act, the United Nations Security Council resolutions on the situation in Yugoslavia, and the norms and principles of international humanitarian law – in particular, the Hague Conventions of 1907, the Geneva Conventions of 1949 relating to the protection of the victims of war and the 1977 Protocols Additional to these, and also the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.

This unlawful action was formally provoked by a staged tragedy – mounted by the Head of the OSCE Kosovo Verification Mission, William Walker from the United States – in the village of Račak, where the bodies of fighters from the so-called Kosovo Liberation Army were dressed up in civilian clothes. Mr. Walker then claimed that an act of “genocide” had taken place and that story duly became the top news item in Western media.

In that regard it was instructive to study the memoirs of British journalist Tim Marshall. He writes that, in the late 1980s, Mr. Walker, who at the time was the US Ambassador to El Salvador, reacted as follows to the news that some priests had been murdered by people wearing army uniforms: “Anyone can get hold of uniforms. The fact that they were dressed in military uniforms does not mean that they were in the military.” Certain participating States do very much have a weakness for theatrical effects.

In general, juggling with the facts is becoming the hallmark of Western diplomacy, which in this way provides work for its war machine. The world was able to see this clearly for itself in connection with Colin Powell’s “Iraqi vial” and the staged productions by the White Helmets regarding alleged chemical attacks in Syria. It is important to keep in mind here that such trickery comes at the cost of tens of thousands of lives lost and the shattered prospects of hundreds of thousands, nay millions of people. No one will ever forget about the crimes of the US and NATO military: these will always be a gaping wound in the heart of Serbian patriots and all those who sympathize with them.

One final point. The NATO countries’ aggression against Yugoslavia in 1999 dealt a grave blow to European security. However, despite the crisis that erupted at the time, all the participating States of our Organization realized that it was unacceptable to create new “iron curtains” and dialogue at the OSCE did not come to a halt. Work continued on drafting the Charter for European Security, which was adopted shortly afterwards at the Istanbul Summit. Subsequently, many other fundamental political documents of the OSCE were developed as well.

The NATO member States that bombed Yugoslavia in 1999 and stand at the origins of the Ukrainian crisis are currently, in effect, continuing their aggression: for the sake of geopolitical goals, they are deliberately fanning the flames of confrontation with Russia and hurling into that pyre countless Russian and Ukrainian lives. As it turns out, their aggression is also directed against diplomacy itself. It seeks to undermine multilateral dialogue and co-operation – to undermine the OSCE. But the fact is that frank and open dialogue, not least within the framework of our Organization, would have been able – had the political will been forthcoming – to avert both the tragedy in Yugoslavia in 1999 and later crises. We urge people to come to their senses and not destroy the very fabric of international co-operation, which is critical for the preservation of peace and security.

Thank you for your attention.