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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE  
1320th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

17 June 2021

**On the report by the Chief Observer of the OSCE Observer Mission at the Russian checkpoints of Gukovo and Donetsk**

Madam Chairperson,

We welcome the distinguished Ambassador György Varga to the Permanent Council and thank him for his report on the work of the OSCE Observer Mission at the Russian border checkpoints of Gukovo and Donetsk, which was deployed on Russian territory as a goodwill gesture on the part of Russia in the wake of the Berlin Declaration issued on 2 July 2014 by the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Russia, Germany, France and Ukraine.

Most importantly, for the entire period of their work, the observers have noted a calm situation at the border, with no movement of troops or military equipment. There are also reports that passenger and freight traffic through the border crossings is gradually recovering after the peak of the pandemic, which is of particular importance for the long-suffering population of Donbas, who have been living for many years under an inhumane economic and transport blockade by the Ukrainian Government.

Against this background, the statements made today by some colleagues in the Permanent Council are very puzzling. We are forced to note that a number of participating States remain committed to a confrontational politicization of the Mission's work. It is clear that your effective work, Ambassador Varga, and the normal situation at the border confirmed by you is merely an irritant to them and a pretext for making unfounded accusations against Russia. This devalues the work of the OSCE field operation.

Let me remind you that this structure was deployed even before the conclusion of the Minsk agreements concerning the parties to the internal Ukrainian conflict, namely the Ukrainian Government and the authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk. The Minsk documents do not mention any obligations on the part of Russia. Decisions to allow OSCE observers on Russian territory, as well as the presence of Ukrainian border guards and customs officers at Russian checkpoints are solely goodwill gestures on Russia's part. We urge our colleagues to keep this in mind.

We emphasize that the mandate and places of work of the Mission are clearly defined by Permanent Council Decision No. 1130 of 24 July 2014, which, incidentally, does not provide for any functional interaction between it and the OSCE missions in other States.

The work of the observers at the Russian border checkpoints was intended to have a positive impact on the settlement of the internal Ukrainian crisis and to encourage the Ukrainian authorities to end the punitive operation against the population of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. However, instead, with the support of foreign handlers, the Ukrainian authorities have chosen the path of accelerated militarization and armed escalation in Donbas, which has resulted in new civilian casualties and much destruction. The Ukrainian Government is also not making meaningful efforts to achieve a lasting, comprehensive political settlement of the internal conflict in the east of the country, refusing to engage in substantive dialogue with representatives of Donbas in the Trilateral Contact Group.

In the light of this situation, we regard the groundless accusations made by a number of countries against Russia and calls to expand the Mission's mandate and to link its activities to the transfer of control of the border in Donbas to the authorities in Kyiv in violation of the sequence of implementation of the Minsk Package of Measures as an abuse of our country's goodwill. They call into question the effectiveness of this confidence-building measure and undermine the conceptual basis for further work by this OSCE field operation.

We will inevitably have to take this situation into account when considering the prospects for extending the Mission's mandate.

Ambassador Varga,

We acknowledge your personal efforts in keeping the Mission running smoothly in the difficult circumstances of the pandemic. The key to this is still the effective interaction you have established with the Russian host authorities. As a contribution to safeguarding the health of the observers, a COVID-19 vaccination with Sputnik V has been made available free of charge by Russia, and most of your staff have already taken advantage of it. This is the first example of systematic vaccination of OSCE field staff.

In conclusion, I should like to thank you and all your colleagues for your work and to wish you the best of health.

Thank you for your attention.