



EUROPEAN UNION

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EU Statement in response to the report by the Chief Observer of the OSCE Observer Mission at two Russian Checkpoints on the Russian-Ukrainian border, Ambassador György Varga

Madam Chair, the European Union warmly welcomes Ambassador György Varga to the Permanent Council and expresses its gratitude for his report. We would like to take this opportunity to reiterate our deep appreciation for the excellent work that your mission is carrying out in providing us with information about movements at the two Russian checkpoints in Gukovo and Donetsk. We regard your Mission as an important confidence-building measure and recall our long-standing support for its significant expansion to all border checkpoints on the Russia-Ukraine State border segment temporarily not under control of the Ukrainian government as well as to monitoring between these border checkpoints.

Madam Chair, our views on the crucial importance of the monitoring of the Ukraine-Russia State border are well-known. Effective and comprehensive monitoring of this border is an integral part of a sustainable political solution to this conflict in line with the Minsk agreements, which include a commitment to re-establish full Ukrainian control over its sovereign territory, including the full control over its entire international border. We recall that the Minsk agreements call for permanent monitoring of the border and verification by the OSCE. The importance of these issues was reaffirmed during the Tirana Ministerial Council, when 35 participating States co-sponsored a draft decision on this topic, which unfortunately failed to be adopted due to the position of the Russian Federation.

In this context, we deeply regret that at the end of May, no consensus to extend the mandate of the Mission for another four months was possible, as Russia suddenly was not in a position to agree to what has been our practice for more than three years. As a result, the Mission must address the detrimental effects on planning and management which the duration of the new mandate to only two months entails.

Ambassador Varga, as you point out in your report, since its establishment in 2014 the Observer Mission has registered the movement of almost 24 million persons, including almost 40 thousand people in military outfits, as well as 685 ambulances, 138 funeral service vehicles, a quarter million of trucks and more than 50 thousand cargo minivans. These numbers are impressive for two reasons.

Firstly, your mission is confined to only two out of eleven border crossing points along the nearly 400 km internationally recognised border which is temporarily not under the control of the government of Ukraine. Information on what happens at other crossing points or between them is sparse except for the very telling observations by long-range SMM's UAVs of for example convoys crossing the uncontrolled segment of the border, very often at night and in areas with no border crossing infrastructure.

Secondly, the very limited size of your Mission, the ongoing restrictions on its freedom of movement and the strict ban of observation tools, even binoculars, prevent you from carrying out more comprehensive monitoring. This only increases our concerns about what is being deliberately hidden from the international community by Russia, especially as the SMM continues to be systematically denied access to border areas by Russia-backed armed formations.

Ambassador Varga, we regret to read about the significant adverse effect that the shortening of the mandate to only two months has already had upon the Mission's operational activities. More time spent on administrative tasks means less time on implementing the mandate. Moreover, it is sad to read that the morale of the staff is decreasing. Those brave women and men serving at the behest of the participating States under these challenging conditions have the right to know what to expect in the coming months in order to be able to plan their professional and personal lives.

Madam Chair, the position taken by the Russian Federation towards the Observer Mission sends an unfortunate political signal and is not in line with the efforts to find a

sustainable peaceful solution to the conflict in eastern Ukraine. We strongly encourage the Russian Federation to reconsider its position in order to allow for a resumption of longer mandates beyond 31 July. It is also important that the decisions of the extensions be taken in a more timely manner, so we trust that we will have constructive discussions on the next renewal of the mandate very soon.

Ambassador Varga, we are grateful to you and your team for your hard work in such constraining conditions. We appreciate your regular briefings and look forward to seeing you again in the Permanent Council.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, and the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

* Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.