



United States Mission to the OSCE

On the Report of the Chief Observer of the OSCE Observer Mission at the Russian Checkpoints Gukovo and Donetsk

As prepared for delivery by Ambassador James S. Gilmore III
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 17, 2020

Ambassador Varga, it is a pleasure to welcome you back to the Permanent Council. As always, we appreciate your leadership of the Observer Mission at the Gukovo and Donetsk checkpoints on the internationally recognized Ukraine-Russia border.

The participating States have charged you with providing us with the best available data on the situation along the Ukraine-Russia border. It is regrettable that your observer teams, however, are restricted to just two of the 11 official border checkpoints along some 260 miles of the Ukraine-Russia border adjacent to the conflict areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. Russia and its proxies also limit the ability of the Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine to fulfill its Ukraine-wide mandate by ordering SMM monitors to leave the crossing points in Ukrainian territory controlled by Russia and its proxies, often immediately upon their arrival.

As we noted during your May appearance before the Permanent Council, you perform a difficult task under even the best of conditions. The CoViD-19 pandemic has added additional layers of complications. You and your team continue to meet this challenge capably.

We recognize that you worked for several months with fewer observers than usual. We were pleased to learn that additional observers have now arrived at the Mission.

The CoViD-19 pandemic has slowed to some extent the number and type of border crossings you have observed. Coupled with the July 27 additional measures to strengthen the ceasefire, the situation in eastern Ukraine has quieted. Your team, however, still observed more than 650,000 individual crossings of the border in the last three months, including 84 persons wearing military-style clothing. These numbers remind us of the vast scope of your work. In fact, since the Mission was stood up in 2014, you have observed nearly 22 million individual crossings of the border and more than 250,000 crossings by vehicle.

During the reporting period starting on May 12, your observers reported 2,500 buses; 15,395 cargo trucks; and 1,898 minivans, all crossing into or out of Ukraine *via* a border

that remains out of the control of Ukrainian authorities. In addition, your observers reported hearing trains on 425 occasions entering or leaving Ukraine.

On July 30 and August 27, the Observer Mission reported the 95th and 96th convoys into Ukraine from Russia.

Regrettably, the contents of these vehicles remain unknown because the Russian government only allows your observers a partial view of activities at the two sites at which they are permitted to work. As the observers are unable to inspect the contents of these vehicles when they cross the border, Russia continues to ensure that we cannot fully ascertain the extent to which it is providing support to its special, conventional, and proxy forces in eastern Ukraine.

This is certainly not new information; we have discussed this issue on numerous occasions. The majority of the participating States of this Permanent Council have voiced support for the geographic expansion of this mission. To date, Russia has opposed any expansion and instead worked to limit the mission to a small portion of the international border.

Given the historic reduction in violence resulting from the “additional measures” agreed to in July, we urge Russia once again to turn away from obstructionism and take concrete action to match the political will demonstrated by the Ukrainian government. We call upon Russia to allow this mission to carry out its mandate at all eleven crossing points.

This Permanent Council is also aware of the administrative restrictions that must be addressed each time we renew the Mission’s mandate. Having successfully extended the length of the mandate from three to four months, we would like to repeat the suggestion of increasing the extension to six months. As we have stated on prior occasions, the United States would support extending the mandate of the Observer Mission, with the caveat that Ambassador Varga continues to present his report to the Permanent Council on a quarterly basis. I hope that all delegations could support this proposal, which will undoubtedly improve the efficiency of this critical mission.

Ambassador Varga, thank you again for your report and for joining us here today at the Permanent Council. The United States joins all participating States in voicing our appreciation for the work of you and your team. You continue to have our strongest support.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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