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STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO THE REPORT BY THE CHIEF OBSERVER OF THE  
OSCE OBSERVER MISSION AT THE RUSSIAN CHECKPOINTS GUKOVO AND  
DONETSK

Delivered by Ambassador Anne-Kirsti Karlsen at the Permanent Council,  
Vienna, 2 September 2021

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mister Chair,

Norway welcomes Ambassador Varga back to the Permanent Council and wants to thank him for a lucid report that provides a detailed insight into the activities of the Observer Mission.

We are very grateful for the vital work ambassador Varga and his team of observers carry out to provide the participating States with reliable, impartial, and transparent reporting. This is indeed an important contribution to confidence building, in line with the OSCE comprehensive concept of security.

We acknowledge the challenging circumstances that the Observer Mission is working under. We are aware of the measures that ambassador Varga has implemented to ensure the duty of care of the mission members and to cope with the challenges posed by COVID-19. They have proven efficient but put additional strain on the team of observers.

We are pleased to hear that there is a good working relationship at the level of local authorities. However, we register that the ability to monitor continues to be severely restricted. A presence of only two checkpoints along more than 400 kilometers of Ukrainian-Russian border, a border outside of Ukrainian Government control, does not allow for comprehensive monitoring.

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Furthermore, other restrictions continue to hamper the ability to monitor the border crossings where the Observer Mission is present, such as limited freedom of movement, limited visual capability to observe certain situations, and the prohibition from using binoculars, cameras, and other means of observation.

Allow me to recall that the Minsk Protocol calls for permanent monitoring of the border and verification by the OSCE, and that the Minsk Package of Measures includes the commitment to reinstate full Ukrainian control over its entire international border.

Despite the restrictions the Observer Mission faces, Ambassador Vargas and his team were able to observe the 100<sup>th</sup> so-called “humanitarian convoy” crossing into Ukraine via the Donetsk border checkpoint. These so-called humanitarian convoys are a violation of Ukrainian sovereignty, as they are conducted without Ukraine’s permission.

Mister Chair,

The Permanent Council decision from January 2018, to extend the Observer Mission’s mandate period from 3 to 4 months was welcomed and ensured that the Mission could spend more time on its core activities and less time on administrative procedures. We share the Chief Observer’s regret that the Permanent Council in May and July was only able to agree on two-month extensions of the Mission’s mandate. The shorter mandate periods have increased administrative burdens and created frustration among Mission members, who now face further impediments to their ability to plan their professional and private lives.

We share the view of Ambassador Varga, that a longer mandate cycle would enhance the effectiveness of the Mission’s operations and reduce the administrative burden. Norway therefore reiterates its support for longer mandate extensions to ensure a smoother functioning of the Mission.

Thank you.