



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1334 Vienna, 2 September 2021

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

Final (596 words)

1. Madam Chair, the European Union warmly welcomes Ambassador György Varga to the Permanent Council. It is our firm belief that monitoring of the Russia-Ukraine state border is crucial for a sustainable political solution to the conflict in line with the Minsk agreements and an integral part of the efforts aimed at fostering stability and security in the region. In this vein, we reiterate our full support to you and the Border Observation Mission.
2. We deeply regret that since May, Russia has been unable to agree to mandates longer than two months for the Border Observer Mission. In your report, Ambassador Varga, you inform about the challenges this situation is causing for the Mission's planning and management, with significant consequences for the staff, the Secretariat, the seconding States and also for the host country. Instead of working on the core tasks of the Mission, the staff needs to devote significant resources to dealing with administrative burdens. On top of this, the lack of legal status and accreditations for the Mission staff are causing additional encumbrances and uncertainties for the staff, lately also with regard to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions and requirements like mandatory quarantine.
3. With this in mind, we agree with you, Ambassador Varga, that a longer mandate period, of at least 6 months, would reduce the burden of the Border Observation Mission and enhance the effectiveness of its operations, as well as increase the

well-being of the staff who is working under challenging conditions. We therefore urge all participating States, to agree to expand the duration of the Mission's mandate. We urge Russia, as the host country, to assign the Mission a proper legal status.

4. Ambassador Varga, we are impressed that your Mission, despite the increased administrative burdens and the ongoing pandemic, has managed to maintain an uninterrupted around-the-clock presence at the two border checkpoints. Your Mission is an important confidence-building measure as you inform the participating States about the situation on the ground. This is why we would like to see an expansion of your Mission 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. We recall that the Minsk agreements call for permanent monitoring of the border and verification by the OSCE.
5. We also note that you have now observed and reported on 100 Russian convoys crossing into Ukraine through the Donetsk border checkpoint, the latest on 12 August. These so-called "humanitarian convoys" entering Ukraine without the permission of the Ukrainian authorities are a violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We regret that as your Mission is not allowed to conduct any inspection or verification of the convoys, it is impossible to know what these convoys contained. This limitation poses serious challenges to the confidence-building effect for which this Mission was created.
6. According to your report Ambassador Varga, the numbers of crossings are again increasing, and we thank you for making these observations. Still, we regret that the host country limits your freedom of movement at the checkpoints and prohibits any use of observation tools like binoculars or cameras. 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.
7. 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 and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA, ANDORRA 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.