



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Head of the Observer Mission at Gukovo and Donetsk Checkpoints

As delivered by Chargé d’Affaires, a.i. Harry Kamian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
February 15, 2018

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ambassador Varga, the United States warmly welcomes you to the Permanent Council. Thank you for your timely, detailed, and informative report. We greatly appreciate your role in providing strong leadership to the OSCE Observer Mission at the Gukovo and Donetsk checkpoints on the Russian-Ukrainian border. The Permanent Council and the rest of international community rely on your impartial reporting. You are our collective, objective, and unbiased eyes and ears on the ground. Let me also join other delegations in expressing our appreciation for the continued efforts to ensure close coordination and collaboration with the SMM leadership and the monitors there. Thank you very much for that. We applaud the excellent work of your team, which operates under potentially dangerous and needlessly restrictive conditions.

Over four hundred kilometers of the Russia-Ukraine border is inaccessible to Ukrainian authorities because of the unilateral control the Russian Federation has exercised since fighting with Ukraine started four years ago. Because of Russian intransigence, your Mission remains limited to conducting regular observation operations at just two of the eleven checkpoints along this 400-plus kilometer span.

Like the overwhelming majority of participating States present here, the United States finds it deeply regrettable that the Russian Federation continues to block expanding the geographic scope of the Observer Mission, despite the clear, strong, and continued urging to do so. Furthermore, Ambassador, as your report makes clear, your team’s ability to move freely remains limited even at the two checkpoints.

Ambassador Varga, your briefing included statistics on the type of vehicles crossing the border, including the number of Russian convoys. the United States disagrees with Russia’s practice of sending to eastern Ukraine so-called “humanitarian convoys,” the true contents of which are concealed from the government of Ukraine and the rest of the international community. Humanitarian aid should be delivered in accordance with international practice and by a recognized international organization.

The United States once again calls on Russia to fulfill its commitment under the Minsk Protocol to allow permanent monitoring of the border and to ensure the Observer Mission can fulfill its mandate to monitor along the entire Russia-Ukraine border, including portions solely under the control of Russia-led forces.

Ambassador Varga, let me again express our gratitude for your leadership of one of the most challenging OSCE field missions. Your work is crucial to establishing the international community's understanding of Russia's destabilizing actions that undermine Ukrainian sovereignty and violate its territorial integrity within its internationally-recognized borders.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.