



United States Mission to the OSCE

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

As delivered by Chargé d’Affaires Courtney Austrian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
February 18, 2021

Ambassador Varga, welcome back to the Permanent Council. As always, we are grateful for the efforts of you and your team. You continue to perform your already challenging duties under exceptionally difficult conditions; we were especially relieved to read the Mission was coronavirus-free.

Since 2014, as your report notes, the Mission observed the movement of nearly 23 million persons, including 39,251 people in military-style outfits, and more than 270,000 vehicles. The staggering numbers you have recorded over the last seven years, however, illuminate only a sliver of the traffic crossing the internationally recognized Russia-Ukraine border.

As we know, Russia severely limited the geographic scope of your Mission, allowing you and your team to monitor only two of the 11 Border Crossing Points along the nearly 400 km internationally-recognized border.

In addition, Russia confines the Observer Mission to specifically designated areas, with limited movement and prohibits the use of binoculars or cameras. In short, your observers are boxed in and blinkered.

Nevertheless, working from your distant positions with limited view, monitors observed the movement of nearly 1.2 million people in the last reporting period. The Mission continues to observe the crossing of individuals in military-style outfits: 196 during this reporting period, many of them wearing badges of emblems of “DPR”, “LPR” or “Novorossiya.” You observed approximately 6,500 buses; 18,000 trucks; 3,000 passenger and cargo minivans; and 1,000 fuel trucks. Also, you documented—just this reporting period—three separate Russian convoys crossing the border, none of which you were afforded the opportunity to inspect, and the contents of which remain anyone’s guess. These numbers represent a significant volume of individuals and vehicles crossing into, or out of, Ukraine *via* an internationally-recognized border that is under the military control of a foreign and unfriendly power.

Meanwhile, we remind the Permanent Council that movement across the Russia-Ukraine border remains largely unregulated, even as Russia restricts the movement of monitors and civilians across the *Line of Contact* and between the Russia-controlled areas of Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts.

We remain cognizant of the administrative issues you face. The administrative and logistical burdens are an unnecessary stress on an already difficult task. The United States continues to support extending the mandate of the Border Observer mission from four months to six months. As we have stated before, such an extension should not preclude you from briefing the Permanent Council three times a year.

The United States joins the other participating States in calling for a geographic expansion of this important mission. We further call on Russia to afford the Observer Mission with the unrestricted movement it needs to effectively report on the situation at all Border Crossing Points along the internationally recognized Russia-Ukraine border.

Ambassador Varga, you continue to have the fullest support of the United States. Thank you to you and your team for your dedication and efforts, particularly during this most difficult period.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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