

Briefing note to the media by the OSCE SMM Chief Monitor

28 April 2016

Thank you for your interest in the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine.

Today, I addressed the OSCE Permanent Council about the security situation and the work of the Mission in Ukraine. Let me share some points with you.

During the past weeks, the SMM has registered the highest number of ceasefire violations in months. Artillery and mortars, proscribed by the Minsk agreements, are being used again in increased numbers. Armed violence in eastern Ukraine has once again reached worrying levels.

Direct attacks against the SMM are taking place with impunity for the perpetrators. Three serious security incidents have taken place recently: weapons were shot in the direction of SMM Monitors, they were threatened at gunpoint, and one SMM vehicle was hit by a bullet.

This impunity for people who threaten, violently mistreat or attack the SMM, or who violate its freedom of movement, must end.

Fighting takes place in hotspots. The fighting there varies in intensity over time. Days of relative calm are followed by days, or even weeks of intense escalation. Just recently, in the week from 11 to 17 April, the Mission has observed particularly intensive violence between Avdiivka and Yasynuvata, to the north of Donetsk. This was the highest level of violence observed since August 2015.

Armed violence has continued also around the city of Zaitseve, around Horlivka and around Svitlodarsk and Debaltseve. An upsurge in ceasefire violations has also taken place in the south of Donetsk region and in Luhansk region.

A growing number of weapons is missing from permanent storage sites and from known weapons holding areas. Many of these facilities are completely abandoned. Our observations suggest that many of these weapons are back in use at the contact line.

The SMM continued to experience restrictions in reaching the Ukraine-Russian Federation border in areas not controlled by the Government.

All civilians in the conflict area are faced with great difficulties when attempting to travel across the contact line. Several of the few official entry-exit checkpoints have been closed, for shorter or for extended periods of time, during recent months. Waiting periods at these checkpoints that remain open are long, and people there are exposed to the dangers of mines and shelling. The closure of the only checkpoint in Luhansk region considerably limits the possibilities for people to reach their work place, use the services of hospitals or see family members. Action needs to be taken to make the crossing of the contact line safer, including by mine action, and to enable civilians to cross the contact line in more locations.

The SMM has also further expanded its presence on both sides of the contact line – both in numbers and geographically. Forward patrol bases are now operational in eight locations, bringing the total of SMM locations in Donetsk and Luhansk regions to 13, eight in government-controlled areas and five in non-government-controlled areas. More forward patrol bases are needed, including in non-government-controlled areas, but for that the SMM needs safety and security reassurances from those in effective control in the respective locations.

The Mission has 699 Monitors, with the aim of further expansion. This expansion is accompanied by an expansion of the Mission's technical

capabilities. Long-range UAVs have been complemented by mid-range and small-size UAVs. In addition, the Mission is now operating three static observation cameras in certain hotspots along the contact line, and this number will be expanded.

A key factor for the constant violations of the ceasefire is that armed formations are standing too close together and have recently moved even closer in some locations. This represents a violation of the Minsk agreements and must not continue. Disengagement is a necessity in the current situation.

A sustainable ceasefire is of central importance to the further implementation of the Minsk agreements. Now is the time for the sides to show visible and decisive action to restore it. The SMM stands ready to facilitate dialogue between the sides in order to return normality to the lives of the people of Ukraine.

Thank you.