



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Chief Observer of the Observer Mission at the Russian Checkpoints of Gukovo and Donetsk

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 11, 2015

The United States warmly welcomes Mr. Picard back to the Permanent Council. We thank you, once again, for your informative report and your leadership of the Observer Mission at the two checkpoints on the hundreds-of-kilometers-long border between Ukraine and Russia.

We welcome your weekly and quarterly reports that provide key insights about cross-border traffic flows at the checkpoints of Gukovo and Donetsk. These include reports of more than 6,000 individuals who crossed the checkpoints in military-style dress—some of whom even crossed the Donetsk border crossing point walking in what resembled a military formation. Your team continues to observe vehicles carrying coffins crossing into Russia, as well as vehicles entering Russia marked with “Cargo 200,” a Russian military term used for personnel killed in action. These and other observations from your mission point clearly to Russia’s aggression and destabilizing actions in eastern Ukraine.

The Mission also continues to register convoys of Russian vehicles crossing into Ukraine through the two border checkpoints. The OSCE observers have only been able to see these convoys from a distance. As Mr. Picard explained at yesterday’s informal briefing, when Ukrainian border guards are allowed to look inside these vehicles, the back doors of the vehicles are opened for 30 seconds and the Ukrainians typically see a wall of boxes. What is behind these boxes remains a mystery.

The mandate of the Mission remains highly restricted and woefully inadequate. As we approach the expiration of the Observer Mission’s current mandate on June 30, a full discussion on its renewal and expansion is needed. We take note that the Chairmanship is one step ahead and has scheduled such a discussion for tomorrow. As the EU, Canada, Turkey, Ukraine, and others have already made clear, an expansion of the mission along the entire border is required to support efforts toward peace.

We remind the Permanent Council that the current mandate limits observations to exactly two pinpoints along the international Russian-Ukrainian border, as combined Russian-separatist forces ensure that the rest of the border along the conflict zone remains off limits to the international community and Ukrainian authorities. Let us also not forget that combined Russian-separatist forces are also systematically denying the Special Monitoring Mission access to the Ukrainian side of the border.

Russia often calls for the full implementation of the Minsk agreements. Russia should heed its own calls, and cease resistance to full international monitoring of the international border, and full inspection by international organizations of anything crossing the border.

Mr. Chair, we remain concerned by the Observer Mission's restricted access within the Gukovo checkpoint, where observers are confined to a small patch of ground. We also understand that Russian authorities will not allow citizens of certain OSCE participating States to take part in the Observer Mission. Our delegation therefore requests that the Secretariat provide an update on negotiations with the Russian Federation to finalize a Memorandum of Understanding for the Observer Mission and report on any denial by the host government of personnel chosen to serve in the Mission.

Mr. Picard, I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of my government to thank you for your tireless work, for your effective management, and your unflappable stewardship in leading a Mission that is a part of the OSCE's effort to contribute to a lasting peace in Ukraine.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.