

On 1 December, Ambassador Ertugrul Apakan addressed the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna:

“Following a relatively calm period in September, the situation in eastern Ukraine is again volatile and dangerous. The ceasefire is broken daily. Proscribed weapons remain in use. This causes a further increase in casualties, including civilians.

During the past months, we have registered the highest number of ceasefire violations this year. Places like Avdiivka, Yasenuvata, Svitlodarsk, the outskirts of Horlivka and, in Luhansk region, the triangle located between Popasna, Troitske and Kalynove have remained hotspots. Fighting again has also spread to other locations.

Human suffering continues and is made worse by every upsurge in fighting: essential infrastructure is being damaged or destroyed, entry-and-exit checkpoints of the contact line are affected, and the economic base of the Donbas is degrading further. In these conditions, the onset of winter is a grave danger for many.

Recent events, such as the deadly incident on 27 October in Makiivka remind us that we need the implementation of a full and sustainable ceasefire. This remains the basic requirement for all progress.

The SMM continues to monitor and report to you on a wide range of issues, including the security situation in Ukraine, and on respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. At the same time, we maintain a sharp focus on the role assigned to the Mission in the Minsk agreements.

Therefore, I want to concentrate on these issues.

Let me start with the urgent need for a new commitment to the withdrawal of heavy weapons. Earlier positive developments in this regard have been reversed in the past months and the daily presence and use of weapons in the security zone present a grave danger and risk. The past months have seen the frequent use of mortars, artillery and even Multi- Launch Rocket Systems.

On both sides of the contact line, *all* regulated weapons should be withdrawn, *all* impediments to monitoring and verification removed, and *all* subsequent violations remedied.

Secondly, there is an urgent need for disengagement. A degree of this has taken place in two out of the three agreed areas: in Zolote in Luhansk region and in Petrivske in Donetsk region.

Unfortunately, we don't have yet full, safe and unhindered access to these areas to SMM. The Mission needs this. Without demining and safe access within the disengagement areas and on adjacent routes for remote observation, there cannot be any verification of disengagement. The role of the JCCC for the Mission's security is crucial in this context.

The efforts towards further disengagement must now continue: forces need to disengage also in Stanytsia Luhanska, where the process has not started yet. Agreement on more disengagement areas should be found.

Moreover, mine action, including marking, mapping and fencing, needs to continue in earnest, particularly in the agreed priority areas.

In this context, I want to mention a topic that is closely related: the issue of checkpoints for civilians at the contact line. These checkpoints are of central importance to the people. Despite the difficult conditions, an estimate of around 30,000 people cross the contact line on a daily basis.

Entry-and-exit checkpoints, where civilians are forced to spend many hours, must be free from the danger of shelling and mines and must be safe places. More checkpoints and an extension of opening hours are needed to increase the safety of civilians.

The period of relative quiet in the beginning of September lasted only for a few weeks. Fighting has since returned to the Donbas. We have all, however, learned an important lesson through these few weeks of silence. A comprehensive ceasefire is possible.

People near the contact line are exhausted and are looking for normalisation, stabilisation and for an end to violence.

I repeat: a comprehensive ceasefire remains the basic requirement for normalization, and accompanying measures must be implemented without delay. We need a new commitment to the withdrawal of weapons, and mine action must continue in earnest. Further steps towards disengagement must be agreed and implemented, in Minsk and on the ground. The SMM is there to support, and needs freedom of movement and full and safe access.

This will need political will and commitment. The measures contained in the Minsk agreements remain the only ones agreed by all sides, and they need to implement them.

The SMM will do its utmost to support the OSCE's efforts to contribute to reducing tensions and fostering peace, stability and security in Ukraine.”