



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Chief Observer of the OSCE Observer Mission at the Russian Checkpoints Gukovo and Donetsk, Ambassador György Varga

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. Harry Kamian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
October 18, 2018

Ambassador Varga, the United States welcomes you back to the Permanent Council. Thank you for your detailed and informative report and your participation in yesterday's informal meeting and your strong leadership at the OSCE Observer Mission at the Gukovo and Donetsk checkpoints on the Russian-Ukrainian border.

Mr. Ambassador, your work is especially difficult, given the circumstances surrounding this operation and the dangerous and unnecessarily restrictive conditions in which you and your team operate. I join other delegations in expressing our appreciation for your objective and detailed reports from the field and for your efforts to closely collaborate and coordinate with the SMM leadership and its monitors.

Mr. Ambassador, despite your best efforts, Russia continues to limit the activities and scope of the Observer Mission and to block its expansion into additional areas. This stands in direct contravention of Russia's commitment under the Minsk Protocol to ensure permanent monitoring of the Russia-Ukraine border.

Although Russia claims it has nothing to hide, the Observer Mission is blocked. Russia has severely limited the movement of the Observation Teams within the Border Crossing Points (BCPs), where Russia also prohibits the use of drones, binoculars, and cameras. While the Observation Mission abides by these limitations, the question remains: *what is the Russian Federation trying to hide on the border?*

Perhaps the answer lies with the actions discovered along the border by the Special Monitoring Mission's UAVs on October 9, 10, 11, and 12. On these occasions, under the cover of darkness, the Mission spotted convoys of trucks and military equipment crossing the border from Russia into Ukraine. The contents of these trucks are *unknown* to us – and it is evident that Moscow does not want us to know. Such behavior is the reason the Observer Mission and the SMM must have complete access to the internationally recognized border between Russia and Ukraine.

During this *single* reporting period, more than 120,000 trucks passed through these two border points. More than 700 crossings of persons in “military-style outfits” were observed during the same period. And five Russian convoys were observed at the Donetsk Border Crossing Point. However, given that the Observer Teams are forced to observe these crossings from a distance, it is impossible for them, and for us, to determine the contents of these trucks or the origin of the individuals in “military-style outfits.” On July 28, an SMM UAV spotted four Russian electronic warfare systems 64 kilometers southwest of Luhansk. Only Russia can explain how these systems entered eastern Ukraine.

Mr. Chair, it is time for Russia to fulfill its Minsk Protocol commitments and allow permanent monitoring of the border. The Observer Mission needs unrestricted access to all areas of the BCPs and must be allowed to witness the internal inspections of vehicles crossing at these points. The United States calls on Russia to afford the Observer Mission the freedom and access it needs to fulfill its mandate along the Russia-Ukraine border, including those areas controlled by Russia-led forces.

Mr. Chair, we again express our gratitude to Ambassador Varga and his team. We call upon the Russian Federation to rescind its restrictive policies that hamper the work of the Observer Mission on the border. Only by providing the Observer Teams with total access to these areas can we gain a full understanding of the situation on the ground.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.