



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1342 Vienna, 28 October 2021

EU Statement in 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

1. Dear Ambassador Varga, it is with heavy hearts that we receive your final report here at the Permanent Council today. The Border Observation Mission was an important confidence-building measure informing the participating States about the situation on the ground. Since 2014, this Mission has provided us with information about the movements across two checkpoints on the Russia-Ukraine border, which is currently not under the control of the Ukrainian government. Together with the SMM and the Trilateral Contact Group, the Border Observation Mission was an important instrument in the OSCE toolbox for resolving the conflict.
2. With this in mind, the European Union deplors the decision by the Russian Federation not to agree to an extension of the Mission's mandate. This is an unfortunate political signal confirming Russia's lack of political will to contribute to the peaceful resolution of the conflict. Paragraph 4 of the Minsk Protocol calls for permanent monitoring of the Ukraine-Russia state border and verification by the OSCE. It also contains a provision to introduce security zones in the Russian and Ukrainian border areas. This is why we consistently repeat that border monitoring is crucial for a sustainable political solution to the conflict. The fact that Russia, as a signatory of the Minsk agreements, decided to end the BOM is a clear step backwards regarding conflict resolution. We call on Russia, a party to the conflict, to assume its responsibility in implementing the Minsk agreements in full.

3. Ambassador Varga, we have been sincerely impressed with the efforts put into the work of the Mission. Under your leadership, the general working conditions of the Mission improved greatly. Over the last seven years, the Mission has observed the crossing of about 25 million persons, including about 40,000 in military-style outfits, almost 250,000 trucks and 55,000 minivans and registered the sound of over 7,200 trains passing over the Russia-Ukraine border. You have also reported on 100 Russian convoys crossing into Ukraine through the Donetsk border crossing point. This information has enabled us, as participating States, to get a factual and evidence-based picture about movements across these two checkpoints.
4. We are grateful for the work that the Border Observer Mission has been able to carry out, despite the extensive restrictions imposed by the host country, such as limitations to the Mission's freedom of movement, prohibitions on the use of observation tools and not allowing the Mission to obtain proper legal status. It was also regrettable that the Mission could not be supported by local staff during its operation. Furthermore, we take note of the information received that the Mission had wished for more support from the CPC in its closing down phase, despite the Secretary-General's personal engagement with the Chief Observer and the Mission's staff. We are nevertheless grateful to you, Ambassador Varga, for how well you handled all challenges, including the fact that you managed to maintain a permanent presence at the border checkpoints during the Covid-19 pandemic.
5. Finally, we would like to express our utmost appreciation for the work carried out by the able men and women who have served in the Border Observation Mission and express our heartfelt gratitude to you, Ambassador Varga, who have led its work in a proficient manner. You and your team have made a much appreciated contribution to fostering a culture of confidence-building in eastern Ukraine, and we wish all of you the best in your future endeavours and would welcome seeing you back within the OSCE soon.

The Candidate Countries the REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, and ALBANIA*, the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA, ANDORRA, and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

* Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.