

OSCE Observer Mission at two Russian checkpoints: UK response to Ambassador Varga

Thank you Mr Chairperson. Thank you Ambassador Varga for sharing your report with the Permanent Council and providing a detailed insight into the activities of your Mission. We are extremely grateful for the crucial work you and your team of observers carry out, especially considering the difficulties you've faced through the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and considerable limitations you have had to endure.

In response to your report, I would like to consider the many limitations imposed on your Mission and the impact that this has on what you are able to report.

Firstly, your mission remains present at only two checkpoints along hundreds of kilometres of the Ukraine-Russia state border, currently outside of Ukrainian government control. I want to reiterate that this remains a long way from the comprehensive border monitoring foreseen under the Minsk agreements. The UK would like to see this presence extended to the entirety of that uncontrolled border. This would be a welcome further contribution by the OSCE to building transparency.

One limitation that prevents your Mission from providing comprehensive monitoring, even of the two border check points where you are stationed, is the freedom of movement restrictions imposed on you at those checkpoints. You have reported that these restrictions limit your ability to fully observe People in Military Style Outfits in vehicles and ambulances crossing at night. Could you share with us what positive impacts the ability to move freely throughout the border checkpoints would have on your reporting?

We note that you are still prohibited from using binoculars, cameras and other observation tools. We would be interested to understand what reasons you have received from the host country for banning the use of these tools – since these excessive limitations continue to show a desire to restrict, as much as possible, what your Mission is able to observe and report.

Despite these limitations, the data provided in your reports shows that there is a clear value to trying to increase transparency at the Ukraine-Russia State border. The thousands of People in Military Style Outfits and hundreds of funeral vans and ambulances that you have observed all underscore how much more may be revealed by truly comprehensive monitoring. This is before even considering the military-style trucks crossing the border on dirt track roads that the SMM has been able to observe.

Your Mission's reports have also usefully highlighted once again the return of so-called humanitarian convoys which Russia sent across the border on 30 July and 27 August in violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial

integrity. Once again, I would like to reiterate the UK's call to the Russian Federation to immediately cease this practice and to facilitate the safe delivery of international aid based on an agreed international mechanism, as foreseen under the Minsk agreements. We note that neither you, nor the Ukrainian Border Guards service, nor the Special Monitoring Mission are able to inspect the contents of those convoys. Again, we cannot but conclude therefore that Russia wants to hide the nature of the cargo being transported in those convoys.

We value the level of ongoing cooperation between your Mission and the SMM. We would be interested to hear more about how you cooperate with the SMM. Such cooperation between your Missions is extremely important as border monitoring and ceasefire monitoring are closely interlinked.

The UK will continue to support the work of this important Mission, including by calling for an end to unnecessary limitations on your operations and supporting a longer mandate extension period. The establishment of genuinely comprehensive monitoring of the entire segment of the Ukraine-Russia State border outside Ukrainian government control, as well as the restoration of full Ukrainian control over that border, is essential. The UK joins the many other States around this table in calling for an expansion of the Mission to the entirety of the uncontrolled section of the border. If Russia truly has nothing to hide, then they should cease their opposition to this expansion.