

# Report by OSCE Chief Observer Ambassador Varga: UK response

Thank you Chair. Thank you Ambassador Varga for briefing the Permanent Council and for providing a detailed report into the activities of your Mission. We are grateful to you and your team of observers for your ongoing efforts to provide the international community with impartial and factual reporting on the situation on the ground, especially given the challenges posed by COVID-19 which we note have been managed effectively.

Unfortunately, your Mission continues to also face restrictions imposed by Russia, limiting monitoring activities and the transparency that your Mission can provide. The UK remains concerned that your Mission is present at only two checkpoints along over 400 kilometres of the uncontrolled section of the Ukraine-Russia state border, outside government control. Our position on this is unchanged – this does not reflect the comprehensive monitoring of the border foreseen under the Minsk agreements.

Moreover, as your report details, the Mission's freedom of movement is heavily restricted at these two checkpoints and it is prohibited from using any observation tools, including binoculars or cameras. This creates unacceptable "blind spots" at both checkpoints where you are unable to monitor certain movements, including to assess whether vehicles are crossing in to Ukraine or not.

Despite these restrictions, the Mission continues to provide valuable reporting on the situation on the ground. Between 1 June and 17 August this year, 33 persons in military style outfits crossed from Russia in to Ukraine. In total during the reporting period, 766,428 people crossed the Russia-Ukraine state border, compared to 486,681 people during the same period last year. Despite the increased movement at these checkpoints, the Russia-backed armed formations continue to use Covid-19 as a pretence for heavily restricting civilians' ability to cross the Line of Contact.

The Mission also continues to inform us about the so-called "humanitarian convoys". Since its deployment in July 2014, the Mission has reported 100 Russian convoys. In this reporting period, the Mission observed a Russian convoy consisting of four vehicles crossing into Ukraine from Russia via the Donetsk BCP on 12 August. These so-called humanitarian convoys cross without Ukraine's permission and therefore violate its sovereignty. The UK once again calls on Russia to cease this practice and to facilitate the safe delivery of international aid based on an agreed international mechanism, as foreseen under the Minsk agreements.

Given these valuable contribution the OSCE Observer Mission makes, the UK remains deeply disappointed that the Mission's mandate has not been extended for any longer than two months since May this year. Ambassador Varga, as your written report to the PC sets out, this poses significant administrative consequences for the Mission's staff, hampers the ability of staff to plan

their professional and private lives and impedes the operational effectiveness of the Mission. We continue to call for the Mission to be given a longer mandate extension.

The UK commends the Mission for its ongoing work in these challenging circumstances. We will continue to support the work of this Mission. We join our international partners in calling on Russia to end all undue restrictions placed on the Observer Mission and to end its objection to the expansion of the Mission to the entirety of the uncontrolled section of the border. We also reiterate the importance of full, safe and unimpeded access for the Special Monitoring Mission to the entire territory of Ukraine, including the border.

I take this opportunity to reiterate the UK's unwavering support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders, including its territorial waters.