



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1269 Vienna, 28 May 2020

EU Statement in response to the Report of the Chief Observer of the Observer Mission at the Russian Checkpoints Gukovo and Donetsk, Ambassador György Varga

Ambassador Varga, the EU welcomes you to the Permanent Council and thanks you for your report which we received well in advance of today's Permanent Council. We commend you and your team for your hard work to implement the mandate of the Observer Mission, in particular in the current challenging circumstances. We are pleased to learn that the Mission has been able to fulfil its mandate in the recent months despite the COVID-19 pandemic. We commend you for the duty of care and the precautionary measures undertaken to protect the health of the Mission members.

The European Union finds the border monitoring on the Russian-Ukrainian State border of vital importance. Effective and comprehensive monitoring of this border is an integral part of a sustainable political solution in line with OSCE principles and commitments. Such a sustainable political solution must re-establish full Ukrainian control over its sovereign territory, including the border. We recall that the Minsk Protocol calls for permanent monitoring of the border and verification by the OSCE and that the Minsk Package of Measures includes a commitment to reinstate full Ukrainian control over its entire international border as part of the foreseen sequence of security and political steps.

In your report, you underline that the freedom of movement of the observer teams within the border checkpoints continue to be restricted while the use of observation tools such as binoculars or cameras remain prohibited. These restrictions lead to what you call blind spots for the observer teams, which we deeply regret. We also regret that the Russian Federation continues to resist an expansion of the Mission and we reiterate our call for a significant expansion of the Mission to all border crossings on the Russia-Ukraine state border currently not under control of the Ukrainian government as well as between these border crossings. The mandate of the mission is currently very limited, and its small size does not provide for comprehensive border monitoring. The limitations put on your work together with the systematic denial of access to certain border areas by Russia-backed armed formations raises clear concerns about what is being hidden from the international community. The removal of the limitations and the geographical expansion of the Mission would be a welcome sign of a more constructive approach by the Russian Federation towards the peaceful settlement of the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine.

We note the decision of the Permanent Council of last week to extend the Observer Mission by a further period of four months. We acknowledge that the shortness of every mandate cycle puts administrative burdens on you and your team, especially in a situation where the Mission lacks a proper legal status. We would support, in line with Ambassador Varga, an extension of the mandate cycle for a longer period ensuring a more stable functioning of the Mission.

We welcome the exchange of information between the Observer Mission and the SMM which is certainly highly beneficial for both Missions and we encourage the further development of this cooperation.

Ambassador, we thank you for your and your team's hard work in such constraining conditions. We appreciate your regular briefings and hope to welcome you back soon with more updates on the situation for the Mission.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, 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.

