



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Acting Chief Observer of the Observer Mission at the Russian Checkpoints of Gukovo and Donetsk

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires a.i. Kate Byrnes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
February 26, 2015

The United States warmly welcomes Mr. Paul Picard to the Permanent Council. We thank you, Mr. Picard, for your leadership of the Observer Mission on the border between Russia and Ukraine, your commitment to this Organization, and your comprehensive report this morning.

We welcome your team's regular reports from the Russian Checkpoints of Gukovo and Donetsk, which have included key information about cross-border traffic flows, men and women crossing the checkpoints in military-style dress, and the transfer of coffins from Ukraine to Russia – including one that was picked up by a Russian military ambulance. Your Mission has also provided critical reporting on the so-called “humanitarian convoys” that frequently cross from Russia into Ukraine without the Ukrainian government's consent in violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and without inspection by the Observer Mission, by Ukrainian authorities, or by appropriate international bodies.

Mr. Chair, I would like to take this opportunity to address the need for comprehensive OSCE monitoring of the entire border between Russia and Ukraine. The Minsk Protocol, agreed on September 5, 2014, requires “the permanent monitoring of the Ukrainian-Russian border and verification by the OSCE with the creation of security zones in the border regions of Ukraine and the Russian Federation.” This requirement is still valid. It is a requirement that is reinforced – not superseded – by the February 12 Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements, point nine of which refers to the need to “restore full control of the border by the Ukrainian government.” The best way for this Organization to effectively monitor the border is for the SMM to gain free and unfettered access to the Ukrainian side of the border, which the separatists do not currently allow, and to expand the mandate of the Observer Mission to include the entire Russian side of the border, which the Russian Federation does not currently allow. An expanded Observer Mission should be permitted to observe at both the border-crossing points and the territory in between them.

Mr. Chair, we are very concerned that, more than seven months after adopting a mandate for the Observer Mission that specifically highlights the need for Russia to grant the observers privileges and immunities, this issue remains unresolved. We urge the Chairmanship, the Secretariat, and the Russian Federation to make this a high priority, and rapidly ensure that the observers are granted the privileges and immunities they need.

Mr. Picard, we thank you and your team for your hard work, determination, and commitment to the OSCE. We greatly appreciate your pragmatic approach to accomplishing your

mandate, your informed perspective on events taking place in the region around the Ukrainian-Russian border, and your honest assessments of what the Observer Mission can and cannot do. We hope to build on your work and have the OSCE monitor the entirety of the international border between Ukraine and Russia. Doing so will contribute greatly to achieving a peaceful resolution of the current crisis that fully respects Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.