



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1259 Vienna, 13 February 2020

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

Mr. Chairperson, the European Union warmly welcomes Ambassador György Varga to the Permanent Council. We are grateful for the report, even though we regret the difficulties you face in order to implement the mandate of the Observer Mission. We thank you for your constant efforts in this regard.

Mr. Chairman, effective and comprehensive monitoring of the Russian-Ukrainian border is an important confidence-building measure contributing to finding a sustainable political resolution of the conflict in Ukraine, in full respect of the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence of Ukraine. 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, as underlined in the conclusions of the last Normandy Summit held in Paris on 9 December.

Ambassador Varga, we are deeply concerned about your continued reports that the freedom of movement for the Mission continues to be heavily restricted by the Russian authorities. It is also regrettable that you are prohibited from using observation tools such as binoculars as it hinders you from doing long distance monitoring. As this is creating what you call in your report as “blind spots” it is clearly a limitation that is in

violation of the mandate of the Mission. This behavior from the Russian Federal Security Service, together with the systematic denial of access to the uncontrolled Ukraine-Russia state border for SMM monitors by Russia-backed armed formations, is running counter to the confidence-building tools that this Mission was intended as, and raises serious concerns about what is being hidden from the international community.

We regret that so-called “humanitarian convoys” continue to enter into Ukrainian territory without consent from the Ukrainian government. In the reporting period, the Observer Mission recorded eleven Russian convoys crossing the Donetsk checkpoint. We are thankful for the spot reports you release concerning this violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. We recall that the Minsk agreements foresee that humanitarian aid will be delivered through an international mechanism.

A vital precondition for an effective mission is that it has a proper timeframe for its duties and that it is not overburdened by administrative tasks. Therefore, it is deeply troublesome that the only time period allowed for the mandate of the Observer Mission is four months. A longer mandate would significantly reduce the administrative burdens generated by every mandate cycle. We regret that the Russian Federation continues to resist an expansion of the Mission’s mandate. We also urge the Russian Federation, as the host country, to assign the Observer Mission a proper legal status in order for the Mission to be able to operate fully and to secure a legal protection for the Observers through the provision of privileges and immunities.

Ambassador, we praise you for continuously trying to find ways forward to getting the job done in these constraining conditions that you face. It is encouraging that you continue to cooperate with the SMM, which we believe could be highly beneficial for both Missions.

Again thank you for your hard work and many thanks for the reports that you provide us with. We appreciate the regular briefings from you here in the Permanent Council and hope to see you back soon with more positive 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, AZERBAIJAN, GEORGIA, ANDORRA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

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