

# UK on closure of the OSCE Border Observer Mission

Thank you Madam Chairperson. Ambassador Varga we are grateful to you for briefing the Permanent Council and for your final report on the activities of the OSCE Observer Mission.

As your report outlines, from when the Observer Mission opened in July 2014 to when it closed on 30 September this year, it provided valuable reporting on the situation on the ground at two checkpoints along the Ukrainian-Russian state border, despite severe restrictions placed upon it by its Russian host. To provide just a few examples, in that period the Mission reported 39,487 people crossing the border in military-style outfits, as well as 100 Russian so-called 'humanitarian convoys' crossing in to Ukraine through the Donetsk border check point.

We note that since the Observer Mission closed, the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine observed on 14 October a convoy of 12 covered cargo trucks with Russian Federation license plates in non-government controlled Donetsk region and a convoy of 10 covered cargo trucks with Russian flags in non-government controlled Luhansk region. These convoys cross into Ukraine without Ukraine's permission, or inspection by Ukrainian border guards, violating its sovereignty. This example clearly highlights the importance of comprehensive independent monitoring along the entirety of the Ukrainian-Russian state border outside of government control, which the closure of the OSCE Observer Mission represents a step away from.

The UK continues to deplore Russia's decision to unilaterally close the Observer Mission, which has reduced the reporting that the international community receives on the security situation in eastern Ukraine and hinders the OSCE's ability to provide necessary transparency and confidence building measures in the region.

We remind Russia once again that as a signatory to the Minsk agreements, including the 2014 Minsk Protocol, it has committed to ensuring permanent monitoring of the Ukrainian-Russian state border and verification by the OSCE. We join the many calls made on Russia in this council to engage in good faith in efforts to enhance OSCE monitoring at the border to fulfil this commitment under the Minsk Protocol.

Finally, I would like to pass on the UK's immense gratitude to Ambassador Varga, your team and everyone who has previously worked for the OSCE Observer Mission for your dedication over the last seven years. We recognise the additional challenges the shortened two-month mandate period, as well as the closure of the Mission, resulted in for Mission members in their professional and private lives. We are grateful to the Mission for its professionalism, hard work and reporting, in these very difficult circumstances. We wish you success in your next endeavours.

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. Thank you, Madam Chair.