

Weekly Update from the OSCE Observer Mission at Russian Checkpoints Gukovo and Donetsk based on information as of 29 March 2016

KAMENSK-SHAKHTINSKIY, RUSSIAN FEDERATION 30 March 2016

This report is for media and the general public.

SUMMARY

Kamensk-Shakhtinskiy, Russian Federation. The Observer Mission (OM) continues to operate 24/7 at both Border Crossing Points (BCPs). The overall cross-border traffic increased at both BCPs. A forty-ninth Russian Convoy crossed at the Donetsk BCP.

OPERATIONAL REMARKS

The OM is currently operating with 21 permanent international staff members (incl. the Chief Observer). The Mission is supported administratively by a Vienna-based staff member.

The mission is fulfilling its mandate without major difficulties.

OBSERVATIONS AT THE BORDER CROSSING POINTS

Persons crossing the border

The profile of the people crossing the border can be categorized as follows:

1. Adults travelling on foot or by car with no or little luggage;
2. Persons in military-style outfits;
3. Families (often including elderly people and/or children), on foot or by car with a significant amount of luggage.

The average number of entries/exits increased overall from 9,685 to 10,398[1] per day for both BCPs compared to last week; the average net flow for both BCPs went from minus 194 to minus 110 (*i.e.* more exits from the Russian Federation) .

The Donetsk BCP continued to experience more traffic than the Gukovo BCP. The cross-border movements registered at both BCPs accounted for 40% of all entries/exits in Rostov region.

Persons in military-style outfits

During the reporting period, the number of men and women in military-style outfits, crossing the border in both directions, increased from 164 last week to 165 this week at both BCPs; 100 of them crossed to the Russian Federation while 65 of them crossed to Ukraine. Approximately 87% of this category's crossings occurred at the Donetsk BCP. These people continued crossing the border individually or in groups and by foot or, in addition to private vehicles, from time to time travelling on busses or in minivans, making it more difficult for the Observer Teams (OTs) to observe their movement across the border.

Families with a significant amount of luggage

During the reporting period, the OTs observed families, often with elderly people and/or children, crossing at both BCPs with a significant amount of luggage or travelling in overloaded cars; two families crossed into the Russian Federation and six families were observed crossing into Ukraine at the Gukovo BCP; two families were observed crossing into the Russian Federation and eleven families crossed into Ukraine at Donetsk BCP.

Bus connections

Regular local and long-distance bus connections continued to operate between Ukraine (Luhansk region) and cities in the Russian Federation. In addition to regular bus connections, the OTs continued to observe bus connections on irregular routes: often the busses do not state their route; instead they just have a sign on the windshield saying "Irregular".

Among these bus connections observed by the OTs, the following "irregular" routes/destinations were noted: Alchevsk-Kharkiv-Kyiv, Rovenki-Kyiv, Luhansk-St. Petersburg, Kharkiv, Kyiv-Luhansk, and Odessa.

On some occasions, the OTs noticed the bus drivers removing the itinerary signs from the windshields of their busses.

The majority of long-distance coaches commuting between Luhansk region and cities in the Russian Federation have number plates issued in Luhansk region.

Trucks

During the reporting period, the OM continued to observe trucks, crossing the border in both directions and at both BCPs. Compared to the previous week, the number of trucks decreased from 675 to 620; 348 of these trucks crossed to the Russian Federation and 272 crossed to Ukraine.

Most of the trucks observed by the OTs were registered in Luhansk region; however, on occasion the OTs also saw trucks registered in other regions of Ukraine such as Donetsk, Kharkiv, Cherkasy, Kyiv, Dnipropetrovsk and Chernivtsi regions. In addition, the OTs at the Donetsk BCP also observed trucks registered in the Russian Federation and Republic of Belarus that crossed the border in both directions.

Separately, the OTs also observed tanker trucks crossing the border in both directions. The number of tanker trucks decreased from 52 last week to 39 this week. These trucks were observed crossing the border at the Donetsk BCP only. These trucks, for the most part, had the words "Propane" and "Flammable" written across the tanks in Russian or Ukrainian. The majority of tanker trucks have hazard signs, indicating that they are transporting propane or a mix of propane with butane.

All trucks undergo systematic inspection by Russian officials, which may include an X-ray check. During the reporting period, no X-ray checks were observed at the Gukovo BCP; 127 trucks were observed to undergo

X-ray checks at the Donetsk BCP. Out of these 127 trucks scanned during the reporting period, 83 trucks (65%) were bound for Ukraine; the remaining 44 trucks (35%) crossed into the Russian Federation.

Minivans

During the reporting period, the OM continued to observe passenger and cargo minivans[2], crossing the border in both directions and at both BCPs. The OTs observed minivans predominantly registered in Luhansk region; however, the OTs frequently saw minivans registered in the Russian Federation.

Compared to the previous week, the number of cargo minivans decreased from 377 to 324; 163 crossed to the Russian Federation and 161 to Ukraine.

Trains

The OTs continued to pick up on the sound of trains running on the train tracks located approximately 150 meters south-west of the Gukovo BCP. During the reporting week, the OTs heard trains on four occasions; the OTs estimated that two trains were going to the Russian Federation and two trains were bound for Ukraine. The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine was informed about the trains bound for Ukraine. Visual observation was not possible because of the line of trees in between the train tracks and the BCP and unfavourable light conditions.

Convoy

On 24 March 2016 at 06:40hrs (Moscow time), a Russian convoy arrived at the Donetsk BCP (see the OM Spot Report of 24 March). A total of 48 vehicles - 42 cargo trucks and 6 support vehicles - were checked by the Russian border guard and customs services; one Russian service dog was present and used to check some of the cargo trucks. Ukrainian representatives were present on site, both when the convoy crossed into Ukraine and when it returned to the Russian Federation. All the vehicles had crossed back into the Russian Federation by 18:00hrs on 24 March.

Other observations

The majority of vehicles crossing the border have number plates issued in Luhansk region or in the Russian Federation.

The OTs continued to observe vehicles with Ukrainian license plates, including articulated trucks with “LPR” (“Luhansk People’s Republic”) or “Novorossiya” stickers, or in rare cases “DPR” (“Donetsk People’s Republic”) stickers on their license plates masking the Ukrainian flag.

On 22 March at 17:05hrs the OT observed a van registered in Ukraine which arrived at the BCP from Ukraine and crossed into the Russian Federation. There was an inscription on the windshield “Gruz 200” (“Cargo 200” which is a well-known Russian military code used for “military personnel killed in action”) in Russian language. The OT could not ascertain whether there was a coffin on board as the rear door was not opened.

For trends and figures at a glance covering the reporting period from 22 March to 29 March 2016 see the attachment here.

[1] Data received from Rostov region Border Guard Service

[2] Passenger minivans: vehicles with more than 8 + 1 seats and a maximum of 16 + 1 seats (light busses which correspond to driving license D1). Cargo minivans: light commercial vehicles with a maximum authorized mass of more than 3.5 t and not more than 7.5 t; with or without a trailer with a maximum mass of less than 750 kg (small cargo vehicles which correspond to driving license C1).

Contacts

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Related



Weekly Update from the OSCE Observer Mission at Russian Checkpoints Gukovo and Donetsk: Trends and figures covering the reporting period between 22 March - 29 March 2016.

Attachment