

# Weekly Update from the OSCE Observer Mission at Russian Checkpoints Gukovo and Donetsk based on information as of 12 April 2016

KAMENSK-SHAKHTINSKIY, RUSSIAN FEDERATION 13 April 2016

## 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.*

## 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.

## 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 9,463 to 10,210[1] per day for both BCPs compared to last week; the average net flow for both BCPs went from minus 118 to minus 114 (*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 37% of all entries/exits in Rostov region<sup>1</sup>.

### 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, decreased from 180 last week to 143 this week at both BCPs; 68 of them crossed to the Russian Federation while 75 of them crossed to Ukraine. Approximately 79% 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 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; one family was observed crossing into the Russian Federation at the Gukovo BCP; one family was observed crossing into the Russian Federation and three families into Ukraine at the 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 or destinations were noted: Alchevsk-Kharkiv-Kyiv, Luhansk-St. Petersburg, Luhansk - Moscow and Luhansk- Kharkiv, Kharkiv, Donetsk-Luhansk- Stariy Oskol, Rovenky-Kyiv, Luhansk-Odessa and Kharkiv-Kyiv-Luhansk.

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 636 to 631; 391 of these trucks crossed to the Russian Federation and 240 crossed to Ukraine.

Most of the trucks observed by the OTs were registered in Luhansk region.

Separately, the OTs also observed tanker trucks crossing the border in both directions. The number of tanker trucks increased from 41 last week to 43 this week. These trucks were observed crossing the border at both BCPs. 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 compared to 110 X-ray checks at Donetsk BCP. At this BCP, out of these 110 trucks scanned during the reporting period, 71 trucks (65%) were bound for Ukraine; the remaining 39 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 increased from 299 to 308; 144 crossed to the Russian Federation and 164 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 eleven occasions; the OTs estimated that five trains were going to the Russian Federation and six 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.

## **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 6 April at 20:08hrs 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 “Ritual Service” and “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 it was carrying a coffin.

During the reporting period, the OTs at the Donetsk BCP observed ambulances on four occasions. All four ambulances were registered in Ukraine and were observed crossing the border in both directions. Besides the medical crew, the OTs did not observe any other persons on board these ambulances.

For trends and figures at a glance covering the reporting period from 1 March to 5 April 2016 see the attachment here.

[1] Data received from Rostov region Border Guard Service

[2] 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**

### **Communication and Media Relations Section**

OSCE Secretariat

Phone: + 43 676 71 74 592

press@osce.org