

Weekly Update from the OSCE Observer Mission at Russian Checkpoints Gukovo and Donetsk based on information as of 8 September 2015

KAMENSK-SHAKHTINSKIY, RUSSIAN FEDERATION 8 September 2015

Please note that 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 decreased at both BCPs.

DETAIL

OM's staff composition

The OM is currently operating with 18 permanent international staff members. One of the permanent observers is performing the duties of an Acting Chief Observer and one the admin duties. Six staff members are currently on leave.

Cross-border movements common to both BCPs

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

1. Families on foot or travelling by car and busses, with a lot of luggage, often accompanied by elderly people;
2. Adults (usually of younger age) with no luggage or empty cars;
3. People wearing military-style clothes with or without backpacks, crossing on foot or in vehicles.

Compared to last week, the average number of entries/exits decreased overall from 11,237 to 9,585 per day for both BCPs; the average net flow went from minus 440 (i.e. more exits from the Russian Federation) to plus 189 (i.e. more entries into 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 just over thirty-four per cent of all entries/exits in the Rostov region. The majority of the vehicles crossing the border have number plates issued in the Ukraine (Luhansk region), including a number of articulated trucks and

long-distance coaches commuting between the Ukraine (Luhansk region) and cities in the Russian Federation.

Common observations at the BCPs

The situation at both BCPs remained calm. The OM continued to observe that the Russian Federation Border Guard and Customs Service conducted checks and controls.

Regular local and long-distance bus connections continued to operate between the Ukraine (Luhansk region) and cities in the Russian Federation. In addition to regular bus connections, the Observer Teams (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 the irregular lines observed by the OTs the following destinations were noted: five busses bound for Kharkiv, one was on the route Luhansk-Kiev, one bus on route to Yalta and one bus to Kyiv.

During the reporting period, the number of men and women in military-style dress, crossing the border in both directions, decreased from 204 to 133 at both BCPs. These people continued crossing the border individually or in groups and on foot or using different types of transport (in addition to vehicles, some used busses, but also bikes and motorbikes). Approximately eighty seven per cent of this category’s crossings occurred at the Donetsk BCP. The OTs continued to observe that from time to time persons in military-style dress have travelled across the border by bus, which makes it more difficult for the OTs to observe their movement across the border. The OTs also continued to observe physically fit young and middle-aged men in civilian clothing, with short haircuts, many of whom carry camouflage-coloured backpacks.

Furthermore, the OTs continued to observe vehicles with Ukrainian license plates, including articulated trucks, with “Donetsk People’s Republic / Lugansk People’s Republic” (“DPR/LPR”) stickers on their license plates replacing the Ukrainian flag.

During the reporting week, the OM continued to observe a high number of trucks, crossing the border in both directions, including intense cargo truck traffic at both BCPs and dumper trucks transporting coal from the Ukraine (Luhansk region) to the Russian Federation through the Gukovo BCP. While the majority of the trucks are registered in the Ukraine (Luhansk region) the OTs also observed trucks registered in the Russian Federation and Republic of Belarus that crossed the border. During the reporting week, the OTs observed that the number of trucks registered in the Republic of Belarus has decreased from 48 to 34; these trucks were observed crossing the border in both directions only at Donetsk BCP. During the reporting week, the OT did not record such crossings at the Gukovo BCP. Separately, the OTs also observed tanker trucks crossing the border in both directions at both BCPs. The number of tanker trucks has decreased from 46 last week to 37 this week. The majority of these trucks 29 crossed at the Donetsk BCP, while the remaining eight crossed at the Gukovo BCP. These trucks for the most part had the words “Propane” and “Flammable” written across the tanks in the Russian language.

During the reporting period, people crossing the border in particular at the Donetsk BCP approached the OTs on several occasions to share their experiences and observations from the Ukrainian side of the border. Border crossers shared with the OTs their impression that the situation in the Luhansk region is improving.

Military movement

At the two BCPs the OM did not observe military movement, apart from the movement of Russian Federation Border Guard Service vehicles transporting BCP personnel and supplies.

Observation at the Gukovo BCP

The traffic flow at the Gukovo BCP has decreased compared to last week. A daily average of 3,013 entries and exits was recorded, which accounted for just under eleven per cent of all entries/exits in the Rostov

region. The net flow went from plus 8 to plus 179 (i.e. more entries into the Russian Federation) on average per day.

During the reporting period, the OM observed a total of 17 persons in military-style clothing crossing the border at the Gukovo BCP, 7 of whom left for Ukraine while 10 entered the Russian Federation.

As in previous weeks, the OM observed dumper trucks transporting coal from the Ukraine to the Russian Federation. As reported previously, the OTs saw Russian Federation Border Guard and Customs Service personnel checking that the trucks were empty while leaving the Russian Federation.

The OTs continued to pick up on the sound of trains running on the train tracks located approximately 150 meters south-west of the BCP. During the reporting week, the OTs heard trains on 24 occasions; the OTs estimated that 16 trains were going to the Russian Federation and 8 trains were bound for Ukraine. Visual observation was not possible because of the line of trees in between the train tracks and the BCP.

On 06 September at 21:30hrs the OT heard the sound of five single shots of assault rifle coming from south-westerly direction.

Observation at the Donetsk BCP

During the reporting period the activity at the Donetsk BCP slightly decreased compared to last week. The daily average of 6,572 entries and exits accounted for just over twenty-three per cent of all entries/exits in the Rostov region. The net flow changed from minus 448 (i.e. more exits from the Russian Federation) to plus 10 (i.e. more entries into the Russian Federation) on average per day.

During the reporting week, the OT observed 116 persons in military-style clothing crossing the border at the Donetsk BCP individually and in groups; 70 persons entered the Russian Federation while 46 left for Ukraine.

During the reporting week the OT observed only one ambulance which crossed the border from Ukraine to the Russian Federation. There were medical crew and two elderly persons on board. No injured persons were observed on board this ambulance.

On 1 September at 12:08hrs the OT observed two men dressed in camouflage style clothing arrive to the BCP from the Russian Federation side in a vehicle registered in the Russian Federation. There was an inscription of the side of the vehicle that said written “Comrades of Novorossiia[1]” and “Battle for Donbass[2]” in Russian language.

On 5 September at 20:05hrs the OT saw a van, registered in Ukraine, which arrived at the BCP from Ukraine and crossed to the Russian Federation. There was an inscription on the windshield in black and white “GRUZ 200” [“Cargo 200” which is a well-known Russian military code used for “military personnel killed in action”] in Russian language. On both sides of the vehicle it said “Ritual service Anubis” also in Russian language. There were three civilian persons inside the vehicle. The OT could not ascertain whether there was a coffin or not on board.

[1] Соратники Новороссии

[2] Битва за Донбасс

Contacts

Communication and Media Relations Section

OSCE Secretariat

Phone: + 43 676 71 74 592

press@osce.org