

Weekly update from the OSCE Observer Mission at Russian Checkpoints Gukovo and Donetsk based on information as of 10:00 (Moscow time), 12 November 2014

KAMENSK-SHAKHTINSKY, RUSSIAN FEDERATION 12 November 2014

SUMMARY

KAMENSK-SHAKHTINSKY, Russian Federation, 12 November 2014 - *As mandated, the Observer Mission (OM) is operating 24/7 at both BCPs. Overall cross-border traffic flows increased at both Border Crossing Points (BCPs). For the first time since late August, more people entered than left the Russian Federation (RF) at the two observed BCPs. The OM observed the highest number of persons in military-style clothing crossing the border in both directions, since the beginning of its mandate. The OM observed them crossing the border more often in groups than previously. They were formed also of a higher number of people, in one instance of 24 persons.*

DETAIL

OM's arrival, establishment and observation work

The OM is currently operating with 20 staff members, which includes 14 permanent international observers, 4 temporary international observers (who are replacing 6 observers currently on leave) and 2 administrative assistants.

Cross-border movements common to both BCPs

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

1. Families on foot or by car with a lot of luggage;
2. Elderly people with few bags;
3. Adults (usually of younger age) with no luggage or empty cars;
4. People wearing military-style clothes with or without backpacks.

The average number of entries/exits increased from 7,042 to 7,523 per day for both BCPs during the reporting period. For the first time since late August the majority of people crossed the border from Ukraine

to the Russian Federation (RF). The average net flow, i.e. the balance of entries and exits, turned from minus 648 to (plus) 182 per day for both BCPs. During the previous week 4,537 left the RF for Ukraine, while this week 1,272 entered the RF from Ukraine. Donetsk BCP continued to experience more traffic than Gukovo BCP. The cross-border movements registered at both BCPs accounted for 37 percent of all entries/exits in the Rostov region. The majority of the vehicles crossing the border have number plates issued in the Luhansk region, including the long-distance coaches commuting between Luhansk and cities in the RF.

Common observations at the BCPs

The situation at both BCPs remained calm. The OM noticed that the RF border guard and customs service have tightened checks and controls at both BCPs. Sniffer dogs were used more frequently, vehicle scans by a mobile x-ray vehicle were performed on a regular basis, and coloured cards or slips were issued to pedestrians who entered the BCPs from Ukraine. In addition, concrete blocks around service booths have replaced sand bag walls. According to a border guard officer, reinforced protections had been requested months ago when combat started close to the border with shells falling in the territory of the RF. Only now they received the concrete blocks. The OM has seen more armed border guards at the BCPs, particularly during nighttime, than in the past weeks.

Due to the cold weather conditions, the number of people crossing the border and talking to the Observer Teams (OTs) continued to decrease. Those who crossed the border from Ukraine reported that the situation remained largely calm in the Luhansk region. However, there is a general impression that the situation is becoming more tense in the area. The number of small arms shootings and artillery fire reported to the OM has increased, e.g. from the areas of Stakhanov, Krasniy Luch, Dyakove and Stanitsya Luhanska. In general, the interlocutors blamed Ukrainian security forces for the resurgence in violence; however, in most cases they have not witnessed the firing themselves. People from urban areas continue to worry about heating during winter as centralised heating systems have reportedly been destroyed in many places. Again, the OM observed numerous people bringing small generators from the RF to Ukraine, which are also being sold from trucks in the vicinity of the BCPs.

Regular local and long-distance bus connections continue to operate between the Luhansk region and cities in the RF.

During the reporting period, the OTs observed 665 men and women in military-style dress crossing the border in both directions. This is the highest number observed so far. These people have been crossing individually or in very small groups, but have recently also crossed in larger groups. On 7 November the OM observed a group of 24 persons in camouflage clothing that crossed by minibus from the RF to Ukraine at Donetsk BCP. These border crossings were made predominantly at Donetsk BCP in both directions. Several Cossacks were also observed by the OTs. The Cossacks are identified by their traditional fur hats, as well as by Cossack insignias. The observers did not see any of them carrying weapons.

As in previous weeks, the OM observed injured or sick persons crossing the border from Ukraine to the RF. The OM also observed the crossing of vans that were apparently assigned for the transport of deceased (see below).

Military movement

At the two BCPs the OM did not observe any military movement, apart from vehicles of the RF border guard service. No aircraft activity was observed at or in the vicinity of the BCPs.

Observation at the Gukovo BCP

The traffic flows at Gukovo BCP decreased slightly compared to last week. A daily average of 2,506 entries and exits was recorded, which accounted for approximately twelve percent of all entries/exits in the Rostov

region. The net flow was positive for the first time since the third week of August. A daily average of 63 people left Ukraine and entered the RF.

During the week, the OM observed a total of 35 persons in military-style clothing crossing the border at Gukovo BCP, 18 of them left for Ukraine while 17 entered the RF.

On 11 November the BCP was temporarily closed and evacuated. According to a border guard officer they had discovered two hand grenades in the luggage of a traveller. The OT could not observe whether this individual had been arrested. An EOD team arrived and gave its 'all-clear' shortly after.

In two instances on 5 and 7 November, the OTs heard small arms shooting from a nearby firing range on Ukrainian territory, which was already mentioned in previous updates.

The OM observed continued high numbers of dumper trucks transporting coal from the Luhansk region to the RF. As reported previously, the observers saw RF customs officers verifying that the trucks were empty while leaving the RF.

Observation at the Donetsk BCP

During the reporting period, the activity at the Donetsk BCP increased slightly. The daily average of 5,018 entries and exits accounted for approximately 25 percent of all entries/exits in the Rostov region. The net flow turned from 457 exits to Ukraine to 119 entrances to the RF on average per day. The total number of border-crossings at Donetsk BCP continued to be almost double that of Gukovo BCP.

The OT observed **630** persons in military clothing crossing the border at Donetsk BCP individually and in groups, mostly to Ukraine.

On 11 November, the OM observed a van marked with signs "gruz 200" ["Cargo 200" which is a well-known Russian military code used for "military personnel killed in action"] crossing from the RF to Ukraine and returning several hours later.

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