

# Weekly Update from the OSCE Observer Mission at Russian Checkpoints Gukovo and Donetsk based on information as of 6 April 2021

## SUMMARY

Kamensk-Shakhtinskiy, Russian Federation. The Observer Mission (OM) continues to operate 24/7 at both Border Crossing Points (BCPs). The overall number of border crossings by persons slightly increased at both BCPs compared to the previous week.

## OPERATIONAL REMARKS

The OM is currently operating with 22 permanent international Mission members, including the Chief Observer (CO). The Mission is supported administratively by a staff member and the Chief of Fund Administration based in Vienna.

### Update on COVID-19 measures

Activities have been impacted by COVID-19 and measures undertaken by the OM to ensure the safety and duty of care of its Mission members and compliance with measures set by the host country authorities. The Mission is continuing to keep the situation under review, in close contact with the OSCE Secretariat and the Chairpersonship. Following the host country's recommendations, the observers are adhering to distancing. Due to the preventive measures taken by the central and regional authorities, the OM is faced with certain difficulties, but is still able to continue to fulfil its mandate without any limitations in its observation and reporting activities. On 31 March the OM members started with the vaccination process in the Mission's area on a voluntary basis. The medical service is provided by the host country authorities free of charge. 60% of the staff has already got the first shot.

## OBSERVATIONS AT THE BORDER CROSSING POINTS

### Persons crossing the border

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

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

The average number of entries/exits slightly increased from 7,996 to 8,012 per day at both BCPs compared to last week.

During the reporting period, the majority of border crossings were to the Russian Federation, with an average net flow of ten per day for both BCPs. The Donetsk BCP continued to experience much more traffic than the Gukovo BCP.

Responding to the COVID-19 situation, the host country closed its borders for the majority of foreigners starting from 18 March 2020. Among the exceptions of persons allowed to cross the border (which entered into force on 19 March) are Ukrainian citizens and stateless persons holding passports or

identification documents proving permanent residence in certain areas of Luhansk and Donetsk regions of Ukraine. In addition, reportedly, due to the threat of the spread of COVID-19, starting from 10 April 2020, the organized passenger transport commuting between the non-government-controlled areas of Luhansk region of Ukraine and the Russian Federation was temporarily suspended and restored from 25 June.

### **Persons in military-style outfits**

During the reporting period, the number of persons in military-style outfits crossing the border was seven, compared to three last week; three persons crossed into the Russian Federation while four persons crossed into Ukraine. These individuals crossed the border on foot.

### **Families with a significant amount of luggage**

The OTs continued to report on families, sometimes with elderly persons and/or children, crossing the border at both BCPs with a significant amount of luggage, or travelling in heavily loaded cars. During this reporting week, three families were observed crossing into the Russian Federation while two families were observed crossing into Ukraine, compared to the previous reporting period when three families were observed crossing into the Russian Federation and two families were observed crossing into Ukraine.

### **Bus connections**

Regular local and long-distance bus connections continued to operate between Ukraine (mostly from/to the Luhansk region) and the Russian Federation. During the reporting period, the OTs observed a slight increase in the overall number of buses crossing the border at both BCPs (291 compared to 286 observed during the previous week). There were 150 buses bound for the Russian Federation and 141 bound for Ukraine.

Among the bus connections observed by the OTs, the following "irregular" route or destination: "Pervomaisk – Sevastopol – Yalta" was noted.

On some occasions, the OTs noticed the bus drivers removing the itinerary signs from the windshields of their buses, while some buses did not display their route at all. The majority of long-distance buses commuting between the Luhansk region and cities in the Russian Federation had Ukrainian licence plates issued in the Luhansk region.

### **Trucks**

During the reporting period, the OTs observed a decrease in the overall number of trucks crossing the border at both BCPs (711 compared to 803 during the previous reporting week); 372 at the Gukovo BCP and 339 at the Donetsk BCP, 352 of these trucks crossed into the Russian Federation, and 359 crossed into Ukraine. Most of the trucks observed by the OTs had Ukrainian licence plates issued in the Luhansk region; however, on a daily basis, the OTs also noted trucks registered in Belarus, Lithuania, the Russian Federation, and trucks with "LPR" plates.

The OTs also continued to observe tanker trucks crossing the border in both directions. During the reporting period, the OTs observed an increase in the overall number of tanker trucks crossing the border at both BCPs (39 compared to 32 during the previous reporting week). These trucks were observed crossing the border at both BCPs. The trucks had the words "Propane" and "Flammable" written across the tanks in either Russian or Ukrainian. The majority of tanker trucks had hazard signs, indicating that they were transporting propane or a mix of propane and butane. All trucks underwent systematic inspection by Russian Federation officials, which could include an X-ray check. Due to the unfavorable observation position at the Gukovo BCP, the OTs continued to be unable to observe any X-ray checks.

Compared to the previous week, the total number of X-ray checks at the Donetsk BCP significantly decreased from 75 to 17. Of the total number of trucks scanned, all 17 trucks (100 per cent) were bound for Ukraine.

### **Minivans**

The OM continued to observe passenger and cargo minivans<sup>[1]</sup> crossing the border in both directions at both BCPs. The OTs observed minivans predominantly with Ukrainian licence plates issued in the Luhansk region; however, the OTs also saw minivans registered in the Russian Federation. During the reporting period, the OTs observed a decrease in the overall number of minivans crossing the border at both BCPs (140 compared to 165 observed during the previous week); 69 crossed into the Russian Federation and another 71 into Ukraine.

### **Trains**

The OTs continued to pick up the sound of trains on the railway tracks located approximately 150m south-west of the Gukovo BCP. During the reporting week, the OTs heard trains on 34 occasions; the OTs assessed that 17 trains were travelling to the Russian Federation and the remaining 17 trains were travelling to Ukraine (more details are provided in the sections “trends and figures at a glance” below).

Visual observation was not possible because of the line of trees located between the train tracks and the BCP.

### **Other observations**

The majority of vehicles crossing the border had Ukrainian licence plates issued in the Luhansk region or Russian Federation licence plates. A significant number of vehicles with “LPR” plates were also observed crossing the border in both directions on a daily basis. The OTs also observed vehicles with Georgian, Armenian and Lithuanian licence plates.

**For trends and figures at a glance covering the period from 2 March 2021 to 6 April 2021, please see [the attachment here](#).**

<sup>[1]</sup> 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 that correspond to driving licence C1).

For PDF attachments or links to sources of further information, please visit:

<https://www.osce.org/observer-mission-at-russian-checkpoints-gukovo-and-donetsk/482888>