

Weekly Update from the OSCE Observer Mission at Russian Checkpoints Gukovo and Donetsk based on information as of 25 May 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 decreased 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) and a First Responder.^[1] 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. During this reporting period, the vaccination process provided by the host country medical system continues on a voluntary basis. By now, 73 per cent of OM staff have received both jabs of the vaccine.

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 decreased from 9,264 to 8,622 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 282 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 two, compared to 18 last week; one person crossed into the Russian Federation while one person 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, no families were observed crossing into the Russian Federation and four families were observed crossing into Ukraine, compared to the previous reporting period when one family was observed crossing into the Russian Federation and one family was 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 decrease in the overall number of buses crossing the border at both BCPs (333 compared to 419 observed during the previous week). There were 169 buses bound for the Russian Federation and 164 bound for Ukraine.

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. Among the bus connections observed by the OTs, the following “irregular” route or destination was noted: Luhansk- Sevastopol.

Trucks

During the reporting period, the OTs observed an increase in the overall number of trucks crossing the border at both BCPs (801 compared to 741 during the previous reporting week); 465 at the Gukovo BCP and 336 at the Donetsk BCP, 434 of these trucks crossed into the Russian Federation, and 367 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 and “DPR” plates.

The OTs also continued to observe tanker trucks crossing the border in both directions. During the reporting period, the OTs observed a slight decrease in the overall number of tanker trucks crossing the border at both BCPs (49 compared to 53 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 slightly decreased from 141 to 138. Of the total number of trucks scanned, 138 trucks (100 per cent) were bound for Ukraine.

Minivans

The OM continued to observe passenger and cargo minivans^[2] 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 an increase in the overall number of minivans crossing the border at both BCPs (153 compared to 135 observed during the previous week); 87 crossed into the Russian Federation and another 66 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 21 occasions; the OTs assessed that 13 trains were travelling to the Russian Federation and the remaining eight 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 and vehicles with “DPR” plates.

On 18 May at 18:32, the OT at the Donetsk BCP observed two ambulances arriving at the BCP from the Russian Federation. The first ambulance “Peugeot” type with the “LPR” plates had an inscription “Ambulance” written in English on the sides. The second brand-new ambulance type “Gazelle” with no licence plates bore an inscription “Emergency Medical Services” written in Russian. After undergoing border and customs control procedures, including an X-ray check, both ambulances left the BCP for Ukraine at 19:46.

On 18 May at 19:48, the OT at the Donetsk BCP observed a cargo minivan with “LPR” plates arriving at the BCP from the Russian Federation. The vehicle had the sign “LPR Post” displayed on the sides (in Russian). After undergoing border and customs control procedures, the vehicles left for Ukraine.

On 19 May at 00:45, the OT at the BCP Donetsk observed two pavement milling machines type “XCMG XM200KII-2” arriving from the Russian Federation. At 02:40, after undergoing border and customs control procedures, the vehicles left the BCP for Ukraine.

On 19 May at 04:02, the OT at the BCP Donetsk observed an ambulance with its flashing lights on and an inscription “Emergency Medical Service” written in Russian, arriving at the BCP from the Russian Federation. After a short stay in front of the BCP’s main building, the ambulance left for Ukraine.

On 19 May at 14:15, the OT at the BCP Donetsk observed a light grey minivan with Russian Federation licence plates and an inscription “Ritual” written in Russian on the side arriving at the BCP from the Russian Federation. After undergoing border and customs control procedures, the vehicle left for Ukraine at 15:45.

On 19 May at 20:21, the OT at the BCP Donetsk observed an ambulance with Russian Federation licence plates and the inscription “Urgent medical help” written in Russian on the side, arriving at the BCP from the Russian Federation. The ambulance parked in front of the BCP’s control area. Two paramedics entered the BCP’s main building and returned after a short while accompanying a woman to the ambulance. At 20:43, the woman returned to the BCP’s main building and the ambulance drove back into the Russian Federation.

The truck with “LPR” plates carrying four jet engines (the main part of the engine, similar to the Klimov VK-1 and the Rolls-Royce Nene jet engines), observed by the OT at the Gukovo BCP on 25 April and reported in recent Weekly Updates is still parked at the BCP’s customs control area facing in the direction of the Russian Federation.

For trends and figures at a glance covering the period from 20 April 2021 to 25 May 2021, please see [the attachment here](#).

[1] First responders are OSCE staff or Mission members deployed for a short period of time.

[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 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/487555>

Contacts:

Communication and Media Relations Section

Phone: + 43 676 71 74 592

press@osce.org