**Speech by Ambassador Ertugrul Apakan, Chief Monitor of the OSCE, Head of the Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine to the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament**

**2 September 2014, Brussels**

Mr. Chair, Distinguished Members of the European Parliament,

It is a great honour for me to speak to you today. I came from Kyiv, where I am currently located. Since mid-April, I am heading the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine and act as Chief Monitor.

The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, basing itself upon OSCE norms, principles and commitments, has been mandated to contribute to reducing tensions and fostering peace, stability and security in Ukraine.

Our mandate that was given to us by the 57 participating States of the OSCE has two dimensions. First, to monitor and report. The second pillar is to facilitate dialogue on the ground.

Our Mission has also been tasked by successive joint statements to play a leading role in assisting Ukrainian authorities and local communities in the implementation of agreed deescalation measures. Here I want to refer to the Geneva Joint Statement of 17 April, by the European Union, the United States, the Russian Federation and Ukraine. We have also welcomed the objectives laid down in the Berlin joint declaration of 2 July.

In this context, we cooperate with the Trilateral Contact Group, composed by the OSCE, Ukraine and the Russian Federation, whose ongoing efforts are also aimed towards deescalation and sustainable ceasefire. We welcomed the recent Summit held in Minsk, also facilitated by the European Union.

Let me give you some information about our mission.

We have at present a total of 233 monitoring officers based on 10 locations. Our monitors come from more than 40 of the 57 participating States, including EU, North America, Russian Federation, the Caucasus or Central Asia. Monitors are civilians and come from different backgrounds, all with high calibre and varied relevant experience.

They provide verified information on the security situation and on specific incidents. They gather facts and regularly report on the basis of impartiality and transparency.

In this regard, our monitors established daily contacts with local, regional and national authorities. They are also in touch with civil society, ethnic and religious groups and members of the local population. The Mission has established a dense network of contacts with all sides to the conflict.

These contacts have allowed us to monitor in areas which are of difficult access. They have also given us the possibility to facilitate the international community in performing a number of tasks arising from circumstances.

The first example I would like to give is our facilitation of the freeing of the Vienna Document observers, mainly from Germany, that were held in the city of Sloviansk. Through our mediation efforts, the observers and their accompaying Ukrainian military escorts were freed.

The second example is the access to the crash site of MH17. The aim of the Dutch, Australian and Malaysian authorities was to reach the crash site and conduct inhindered work there. Parallel contacts of our Mission both in Kiev and Donetsk made it possible to establish a secure access path to the crash site and a window of time during which work could be conducted.

The Special Monitoring Mission is ready to consider any other requests of facilitation of the international community. As a matter of fact, we are already preparing ourselves for possible new taskings in areas such as cease fire monitoring, partial border monitoring, confidence building measures, etc.

An expansion of our activities will happen once a ceasefire is in place. We will enhance the number of our monitors and rely on specialists for various tasks related to the period post-ceasefire. Our monitoring, currently done through foot or car patrols, will also be supported by unmanned aerial vehicules in a few weeks.

Our tools are OSCE’s concept of comprehensive security and OSCE values. Our future missions will most likely also include measures such as assisting dialogue at local and national level, empowerment of civil society and women and the rule of law.

Our overall aim is to support the Ukrainian people in their endeavours for normalisation for a better, pluralistic and democratic Ukraine.

After these considerations about our mission’s role, let me give you highlights about our findings through our monitoring of the situation.

First of all, we have witnessed a need for inclusivity and reaching out towards the populations in the East. We have also seen a partial attempt to start a dialogue through the holding of three national round table meetings.

In a subsequent period, we have seen a degradation of the security situation in the East with seizures of public buildings and police stations in the East of the country by illegal armed groups.

While violence started mainly around illegal check points, the northern part of Donetsk and southern part of Luhansk regions were gradually controlled by armed groups representing the so-called ‘Donetsk People’s Republic’ (DPR), the so-called ‘Luhansk People’s Republic’ (LPR) and other irregular armed groups.

This degradation of the security situation also hit our Mission with eight of our monitors held for more than a month by one of the armed groups operating in the East of Ukraine.

Whilst separatist forces have suffered reversals, last week we have heard press reports that point to the opening of a new front of fighting along Ukraine's southern coast, in the direction of the key port of Mariupol. It has further been reported that several small towns and villages in the area are now in the midst of heavy fighting, while the town of Novoazovsk has been seized by the armed groups. Our teams in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts strive to go as close as possible to these areas and come up with their own observations. The situation on the ground is fraught with uncertainties. For our civilian monitors to be able to go these hot spots, we need security guarantees and our present contacts are directed to this aim. The situation on the ground is fraught with uncertainties. We hope to be reporting soon about these developments.

Let me dwell upon to some of our findings on the humanitarian and human rights situation in Ukraine.

Our monitors have witnessed the dramatic consequences of the intensification of the fighting that has gradually involved heavier weaponry from both sides and resulted in significant combat and civilian casualties and material damage.

While in the early months of the conflict, 10-11 people were killed on average every day, with the intensification of the fighting, the average number of casualties a day jumped this last month to 36. It is estimated that half the population of Donetsk and Luhansk cities has left. The remaining population in these cities is estimated at 200-500 thousand in Donetsk and about 250,000 in Luhansk.

In our daily and weekly reports, we focus on a number of human rights issues. These involve civilian being targeted by fighting, shelling and indiscriminate use of heavy weapons, abductions and other human rights abuses. There are a number of issues in areas controlled by the separatist armed groups. We have also come across issues related to voluntary Ukrainian battalions fighting in the East.

Our monitors were the first international mission to reach Sloviansk after its retaking. More than 2,000 detached houses were damaged during hostilities, of which 200 are inhabitable. Approximately 224 multi-storey buildings were damaged, eight of them seriously. In all, 5,070 flats were damaged, 1,340 of which are in need of complete repair. While Ukrainian Government’s efforts have brought public utilities back to town, the need assessment carried out by the United Nations identified winterization and housing as a priority.

The events in Crimea and the fighting in the East have also led to a vague of displacement. The United Nations is aware of around 190 thousand Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) of whom 15,000 are from Crimea and 175 thousand from the East. However, the actual number of people who have fled the violence and fighting is thought to be much higher. The international community should support the efforts of the Ukrainian Government in dealing with the IDP’s.

The SMM has noted an on-going trend of IDP returns to certain areas recently re-taken by Ukrainian troops – in, for example, Sloviansk and Kramatorsk in northern Donetsk region. The returns indicate a certain degree of stability and security, and that efforts are underway to restore basic services. The SMM has, however, noted that in other areas recently re-taken – namely in northern Luhansk – security is still fragile.

The SMM regularly meets with representatives of the Centre for National Minorities in the Transcarpathian Region which borders four countries and four minority communities are represented in the region: Hungarians, Romanians, Poles and Slovaks. The SMM also monitored the situation of the Greek minority in Mariupol. The representatives informed the SMM that presently inter-ethnic relations remain sound.

As I conclude my statement, I would like to point out that our mission is striving for a peaceful environment and dialogue. I genuinely believe in the value of a Ukrainian-led and Ukrainian-owned dialogue within the Ukrainian society in order to build a new foundation and resolve outstanding issues. The unity and integrity of the country is of paramount importance.

Our joint efforts of reducing tensions and fostering peace, stability, security and normalization in Ukraine will continue. The days and weeks ahead are vital ones for the people of Ukraine. The launching of a new process based on the President Poroshenko’s Peace Plan, the democratic process, legislative elections of 26 October, a sustained cease fire and dialogue are important pillars of a future peaceful agenda.

The stability of Ukraine is in all our interests. Many stakeholders are now working with the support of the international community to stabilize the country. The Swiss Chairmanship of the OSCE has invited all sides for dialogue. We believe a peaceful resolution to the conflict based on OSCE norms, principles and commitments could be found.

I believe the whole international community including the European Union should support efforts towards normalization in Ukraine.

The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission will do all it can to facilitate and support these efforts.

Thank you.