

# UKRAINE: The first fatality of the OSCE SMM in Ukraine

Odessablogger (23.04.2017) – <http://bit.ly/2pbUQFr> – It is perhaps to view matters in a somewhat fatalistic way to be less than surprised by the tragic news of the first fatality, and serious injuries to others from among those that compose the [OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine](#).

The war in the Donbas has claimed yet more lives of non-combatants.

It appears that a SMM vehicle drove over a mine in the occupied territory of Luhansk with fatal results.

A reader can expect swift claims that the SMM had traveled along an unauthorised route – and also that it was the Ukrainian military that entered the occupied Lugansk territory and laid the mine in question. From the viewpoint of those controlling the occupied Luhansk territories it is a natural reaction.

The reaction of the Ukrainian leadership will be equally as obvious.

Curators of the occupied territories in Moscow may or may not think a little more carefully before making statements considering the lost OSCE soul is apparently either a US or UK citizen (it is unclear at the time of writing), the injured a German, and depending upon what can be achieved not only within the realm of foreign public consumption, but also any opportunities for tweaking that they may wish to make within the leadership of occupied Luhansk. The Russian domestic audience is unlikely to pay much attention to such an incident – if it features on the Russian news cycle with any prominence at all.

For Russia to consider altering course it perhaps depends far more on any destabilising seepage back into surrounding Russian oblasts than upon anything else.

A reader will also expect blunt statements from the European political community regarding the need for a swift and transparent investigation into this fatal incident. If MH17, or more generally the inability of the SMM to fully carry out their mandate within the occupied territories is any guide, then they will be statements of hope rather than expectation.

What statements, if any, from the US are perhaps a little less predictable these days, even if it turns out to be a US rather than UK citizen that died upholding an international mandate.

For all the disparaging remarks made about the SMM by those among the Ukrainian, occupied territory and Russian commentators, when taking a step back and assessing the overall SMM effectiveness in fulfilling its mandate – a mandate which is one of monitoring and not peacekeeping or peacemaking – then it has to be said that Alexander Hug has done a very good job under very difficult circumstances.

The mission operates in an environment swimming in mistrust between opposing sides and also by both sides regarding the SMM mission. In effect it operates within its mandate but also within the parameters that either side provide it on the ground. Further there are some rather suspect monitors among those that have made up the SMM team which adds to the distrust by both sides and no doubt also complicates matters for Mr Hug internally and externally of the SMM set up.

It is almost a forgone conclusion that this incident will be barely mentioned in European news cycles due to the French going to the polls, despite this being the first fatality and serious injuries received by SMM monitors in Ukraine since 2014 when the mission began. Long since have near misses and SMM vehicles getting hit by bullets made the news.

Social media will be filled with less than nuanced commentary that pays no regard to the parameters of the SMM mission – regardless of whatever limited effectiveness that is perceived in fulfilling it. Aside from the role it plays in documenting events, and the daily public SMM reports do not necessarily equate to the detail contained in reports that are not made public, it is particularly difficult to measure prevention – and who knows what skirmishes, battles and other acts were considered and abandoned due to the SMM presence?

Whatever the case, the war in the Donbas has claimed yet another life of an unarmed non-combatant.

Due to the precedent set (if a somewhat expected eventuality) by the loss of the poor soul involved, it remains to be seen whether it is a life that may actually stand out among the others in the daily summaries relating to eastern Ukraine that are wearily pushed in front of European government ministers.

It may perhaps focus minds, even if temporarily, on the role of the SMM in eastern Ukraine, notwithstanding the tools/equipment and vocal diplomatic support they have to achieve it.

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