



PULSE OF PEACE IN DONBAS

monthly newsletter

- COVID-19: how the pandemic affected life in the zone of armed conflict, including in uncontrolled territories. Analysis and useful links
- News from CivilM + and member organizations
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- Legislative initiatives and analysis of the conflict
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COVID-19 in Donbas

[As of May 28](#), in the territory of the temporarily uncontrolled part of the Luhansk region (self-proclaimed "LPR") 393 cases of COVID-19 were reported, with seven people dead. In the temporarily uncontrolled part of the Donetsk region (the self-proclaimed "DPR"), on May 27, a figure of approximately 435 cases was [announced](#), fourteen of which were fatal. The Ministry of Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine states that these data are underestimated and do not reflect the real situation in the region. Meanwhile, in some parts of the occupied territories partial removal of restrictions have been [planned since May 13](#), including the launch of public transport and the opening of street markets. According to the Ukrainian Ministry of Health, as [of May 26](#) in the Luhansk region, there are 44 cases of COVID, and in the Donetsk region - 155 cases. Based on these data, in comparison with parts of Donbas controlled by the Ukrainian government, the situation in the so-called "L/DPR" is more complicated. According to the [findings](#) of the International Crisis Group, the closure of checkpoints and the deterioration of the health sector in the so-called "LPR DPR" can play a significant role in worsening the situation of the civilian population.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [emphasizes](#) that the ability of public organizations to provide humanitarian assistance to residents of the temporarily

uncontrolled territories of Donbas remains limited, and only two UN-organized humanitarian convoys were able to arrive in Donetsk since the beginning of quarantine.

Ukraine's international partners urge all parties to take measures to protect civilians. The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Germany, Heiko Maas, [called for the opening of the contact line](#), which has been closed by the quarantine in Donbas, so that residents of uncontrolled territories could receive pensions. He also called on Russia to influence the self-proclaimed "republics" so that they do not interfere with the work of OSCE observers under the pretext of a pandemic. The call to open checkpoints in Donbas was also supported by Pablo Mateu, a representative of the UN Refugee Agency in Ukraine (UNHCR). [According to UNHCR](#), the proportion of elderly residents in the area of the contact line in Donbas is 41% of the population.

Public initiatives continue to help civilian residents of Donbas. For instance, the resource center for civil society "Drukarnya" in Slavyansk (supported by DRA) launched a partnership [project "Social and humanitarian response to the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in eastern Ukraine"](#) together with the Charitable Foundations East-SOS and the "New Way". The aim of the project is to provide humanitarian and psychological assistance to the most vulnerable groups and inform the public about preventive measures and quarantine restrictions.

The Right to Protection Charitable Foundation has [analyzed](#) the level of work of public services during quarantine, including in the uncontrolled regions of Donbas, and also published a [report](#) on the operation of the checkpoints during quarantine and the difficulties caused by this.

[The stories of residents of the region](#), who cannot return home because of the closed checkpoints, were collected by the Kharkiv Human Rights Group. Thanks to the joint efforts of human rights defenders, the Ukrainian Ombudsman and the headquarters of the Joint Force Operations, several dozen people were able to cross the contact line and get home. Priority was given to people who had significant medical reasons.

[A report on quarantine in Donbas](#) was also prepared by Radio Liberty.

News from CivilM + and member organizations

- May 13, 2020 - CivilM+ Platform expert Wilfried Jilge took part in the [online discussion "Polish and German views on the East"](#), where he expressed the view that Russian actions in eastern Ukraine largely determine the agenda of relations between Germany and Russia (*video in English*)
- May 28, 2020 – an expert discussion of the large-scale document "Conflict Actors' Map", prepared within the framework of the CivilM+ Platform project, took place. Experts from CivilM+ and "Democracy House" worked on the publication for about two years. The "Conflict Actors' Map" is an information and analytical review of the positions, interests and actions of officials, political parties and organizations involved in the Russian-Ukrainian armed conflict in Donbas. The document is built on 4 levels: Ukrainian actors, Russian actors, quasi-state entities "DPR" and "LPR", and international actors. The experts highly appreciated the work and expressed their support for its continuation, including in an interactive online format.

- Stefan Melle, head of the German public organization DRA e.V., in his column on the anniversary of the end of World War II, [analyzes](#) Germany's experience in overcoming the consequences of war and unification of the country and how the German experience can help Ukraine to develop a strategy for the reintegration of its citizens and territories (*text in Russian*)
- Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union (UHHRU) held a [webinar](#) "Criminal proceedings on cases related to the occupation of Crimea and the conflict in Donbas under the in absentia procedure: current status and prospects for improvement", with Mykola Mazur, judge of the Supreme Court of Ukraine (*text and video in Ukrainian*)
- UHHRU organized an [online lecture](#) for civil servants on the national regulation of sanctions. The lecture was delivered by Yulia Kazdobina, head of the Ukrainian Foundation for Security Studios (*text and video in Ukrainian*)
- The Center for Civil Liberties has joined the joint [appeal](#) of human rights organizations of Ukraine on the Government's Program of Activities and on overcoming the consequences of the armed conflict in it. Human rights activists have drawn attention to the insufficient prioritization of the issue of overcoming the consequences of armed conflict in the Government's Program of Activities (*text in Ukrainian*)

Political processes and events in the conflict zone

Minsk process

- May 5, 2020 - President of Ukraine Vladimir Zelensky signed a [decree](#) approving the composition of the Ukrainian delegation to the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) for the peaceful settlement of the situation in Donetsk and Luhansk regions. The delegation is headed by the second President of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma. Alexey Reznikov, Minister for Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories and Alexander Merezhko, Head of the Verkhovna Rada Committee on Foreign Policy and Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation, were appointed his deputies. Andriy Yermak, the head of the Office of the President, who moderates the activities of the Ukrainian delegation in the TCG, noted that this decree defines the segment of responsibility of each of the delegation members, and Oleksiy Reznikov [outlined](#) the main steps for the further activities of the TCG. This decision received [mixed](#) reviews from Ukrainian politicians (*text in Ukrainian and Russian*)
- May 7, 2020 - a [statement](#) was issued by the European Union in support of the activities of the TCG and the Normandy format to achieve a sustainable political settlement in the Donbas. The statement also calls for Russia to influence the self-proclaimed "L/DPR" for the resumption of access by the OSCE SMM to the territory not controlled by the Government of Ukraine. The same calls were reiterated in a statement [released](#) by the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna on Thursday May 21 (*text in English*)
- May 8, 2020 - Yevgeny Tsymbalyuk, Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the international organizations in Vienna, during an online meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council, [said that the Ukrainian side did not intend to discuss proposals put forward by Russia](#) in the framework of the TCG to limit access to the OSCE

Special Monitoring Mission to the territories not controlled by Ukrainian government
(text in Russian)

- May 13, 2020 - Dmitry Kozak, deputy head of the Russian Presidential Administration, took part in bilateral [negotiations](#) in Berlin on the situation in Ukraine. According to Kozak, the negotiations were [constructive](#). In his commentary, Dmitry Kuleba, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, emphasized that the Ukrainian side was [aware](#) of these negotiations in advance, and the reason for the negotiations was the lack of progress in implementing the Minsk agreements. Later, a phone conversation took place between the foreign ministers of Germany and Russia. They [discussed](#) issues with regards to resolving the conflict in Donbas (text in Russian)
- May 14, 2020 - the first [meeting](#) of the TCG within the Minsk Format was held with the updated composition of the Ukrainian delegation. The humanitarian subgroup continued to compile lists for the next exchange of held persons and lists of missing persons, and the economic subgroup announced the need to organize a process for verification of Ukrainian property located in the temporarily occupied territories (text in [Ukrainian](#), [Russian](#) and [English](#))
- May 14, 2020. - Boris Gryzlov, Russia's representative in the TCG, [said](#) the meeting of the TCG was almost in jeopardy due to the position of Kyiv not to conduct a direct dialogue with representatives of L/DPR (text in Russian)
- May 20, 2020 - president of Ukraine Vladimir Zelensky held a press conference to mark his first anniversary in office. Answering questions related to Russia's military aggression in Donbas, the President emphasized that the Russian Federation is obliged to [influence](#) illegal armed groups in the temporarily occupied territories of Donbas in order to stop shelling. Summing up the measures taken to resolve the situation in Donbas, Vladimir Zelensky confirmed his commitment to any negotiation formats that would bring the territories of Donbas back under Ukrainian control, described the role of the Minsk Agreements positively and noted that he would fight for their implementation, including conducting personal negotiations with Vladimir Putin. Commenting on the topic of Ukrainian political prisoners held in Russia, Vladimir Zelensky [stressed](#) that after the pandemic of COVID-19 he will continue to fight for their return and informed the public about ongoing negotiations regarding the next exchange (text in Ukrainian).
- During the press conference, Vladimir Zelensky also announced preparations for an extraordinary meeting of the TCG, due to the fact that earlier that day the head of the so-called "LPR", Leonid Pasechnik, [announced](#) that the troops were "on alert" because of "regular shelling by the Ukrainian military of civilians and civilian infrastructure and the OSCE patrol". Later, a similar statement was made by Denis Pushilin, the head of the so-called "DPR" (text in Ukrainian)
- May 21, 2020 - an online meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council was held. The Ukrainian side [drew](#) the attention of the foreign delegations present to Russia's attempts to relieve itself of responsibility as a participant in the conflict in eastern Ukraine at the Minsk negotiations, as well as attempts to force the participation of people who do not represent local residents of the parts of Donbas temporarily outside Ukrainian control and [have](#) Russian citizenship in meetings of the TCG (text in Russian, Ukrainian)
- May 22, 2020 - an extraordinary meeting of the TCG was held in the format of a video conference, at which the EU statement on the continuing aggression of Russia against Ukraine and the illegal occupation of Crimea was published. Heidi

Grau, Special Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office in Ukraine and the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG), [announced the confirmation](#) of a ceasefire in the area of Berezovskoye in the Luhansk region and the resumption of repair and restoration work on the high-voltage power line (*text in Russian*)

- May 27, 2020 - a [meeting of the TCG](#) took place in the format of a video conference and included the discussion of the following issues: ensuring the the freedom of movement of the OSCE SMM by the Russian side, new areas for the separation of forces, and the opening of new checkpoints on the contact line. According to the [OSCE report](#), as part of the work of the humanitarian group, an agreement was reached to discuss lists for the exchange of detainees at the next meeting (*text in Ukrainian, English*)
- Further prospects of the new format of the Minsk negotiations, as well as the possibility of expanding the composition of negotiators are discussed in the reports of [Hromadske](#) and [Radio Liberty](#) (*text and audio in Russian*)

Other events

- Throughout May, the OSCE SMM [repeatedly declared](#) the impossibility of access to the parts of Donbas not controlled by the Ukrainian government and other obstacles to the implementation of their mandate imposed by representatives of the so-called “L/DPR” (*text in Ukrainian*)
- May 14, 2020 - it became known that Leonid Kharchenko, one of the defendants in the case of the crash of a Boeing MH-17, which is pending trial in the Netherlands, was [arrested](#) in Donetsk in March. In Donetsk, the self-proclaimed authorities charged Kharchenko with possession of weapons and participating in an illegal search in 2014. [According to analysts](#), the arrest was fabricated in order to isolate Kharchenko and prevent his detention by the Ukrainian secret services (*text in Russian*)
- May 14, 2020 - Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelensky issued a decree imposing sanctions against state Russian museums and other cultural and art institutions. The sources and significance of this decree are [analyzed](#) by Novaya Gazeta (*text in Russian*)
- May 17, 2020 - on the Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Political Repressions, the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry published a [comment](#) calling on the international community to stop the repressions in Crimea and the occupied regions of Donbas (*text in Ukrainian*)
- 21 May, 2020 - a street [rally was held in Kyiv](#) “[Mr. President, talk with us](#)”, organized by relatives of people held in Russian prisons for politically motivated reasons. The protesters demanded a meeting with Vladimir Zelensky and an exchange of prisoners according to the “all for all” formula. According to the SBU, 214 people are still held in custody in the so-called “D/LPR”. Their [stories](#) are included in a report by Radio Liberty (*text in Ukrainian*)
- May 23, 2020 - the first sentence “for propaganda of the war” was [pronounced in the Donetsk region](#). The woman, a resident of Pokrovsk, was sentenced to 3 years and 3 months in prison with a trial period of 1 year for publishing texts containing calls for the violation of the Constitution of Ukraine on the social media “Vkontakte” (*text in Ukrainian*)

- May 24, 2020 – an official representative of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation Svetlana Petrenko [reported that more than 300 criminal cases](#) are being investigated in Russia in connection with the shelling in Donbas (*text in Russian*)

Legislative initiatives and analysis on the conflict

- Alexei Reznikov, the Minister for Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories, gave a big interview to the Donbas News portal about the scenarios and factors of the reintegration of Donbas ([video](#) and [text in Russian](#))
- The Atlantic Council website published an [article](#) by John Herbst, a former US ambassador to Ukraine, criticizing the [report by the International Crisis Group on lifting international sanctions against Russia](#) as one of the potential opportunities for the Donbas peace process. According to John Herbst, it is sanctions that are the decisive factor in deterring aggression on the part of Russia and reducing this pressure could be a serious mistake. The publication of the ICG report was also [criticized](#) by Ukrainian experts (*text in English, Russian*)
- The Ilya Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation published an [analytical report](#), “Public Thought in Donbas: Changes After the 2019 Elections, New Risks Against the Background of the War and the COVID-19 Pandemic”. The report is based on a study conducted in the first quarter of 2020 in parts of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions controlled by the Ukrainian government. For the first time since 2014, sociologists have noted the phenomenon of “getting used to the war” and the willingness of local residents to live near the contact line so as not to lose their precarious stability (*text in Ukrainian*)
- The results of the [study](#) “Respecting the right of access to justice for internally displaced persons and residents of temporarily occupied territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions” were published. It was conducted by a group of Ukrainian human rights defenders as part of a mentoring program with the support of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (*text in Ukrainian*)
- The NGO “Influence Group” published the [newsletter](#) “Electoral Rights of IDPs and Labor Migrants” for May 2020 (*text in Ukrainian*)
- [The first issue of the International Crisis Group’s podcast “War and Peace” has been launched](#), opening a cycle about the conflict in Ukraine. The issue “The role of Russia and Europe in resolving the conflict in Ukraine” is dedicated to the history of the development of the conflict and the prospects for its resolution (*audio in English*)
- Aleksey Reznikov, Minister for Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories, [said](#) that according to his information, the so-called “L/DPR” currently had given out about 200 thousand Russian passports (*text in Ukrainian*)

Assistance to civilian victims of the conflict

- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine [announced](#) the launch of a platform that will coordinate international efforts to free Ukrainian political prisoners held in Russia. It is assumed that among its participants there will be representatives both of state authorities and public human rights organizations and former political prisoners (*text in Ukrainian*)
- On May 14 2020, a [woman was blown up by a mine](#) in an attempt to cross the line of contact, bypassing the closed CPVV. The incident occurred near the village of Novotroitskoye (territory controlled by the government). The Geneva Call NGO [reports](#) that during the conflict in Donbas at least 600 civilians have died from anti-personnel mines. According to the [testimonies](#) of the victims, it is very difficult to obtain compensation from the state for injuries (*text in Russian, Ukrainian*)
- On May 19 2020 - during shelling, three residential buildings in government-controlled Krasnogorovka were [damaged](#) (*text in Russian*)
- May 25, 2020, the regular report on the work of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission as of 18 May 2020 states that since the start of 2020, 44 civilians have become casualties of the military operations, including 6 fatalities (*text in [Russian](#), [Ukrainian](#), [English](#)*)
- East-SOS Charitable Foundation published a report on human rights violations in occupied areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions in April 2020 (*text in [Ukrainian](#), [Russian](#), [English](#)*)
- Matilda Bogner, head of the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, announced a sharp increase in the number of civilian casualties in early May and called on all parties to the conflict to make the protection of civilians their absolute priority (*text in [Ukrainian](#) and [English](#)*)
- The Right to Protection Charitable Foundation has begun developing a [chat bot](#) which will help IDPs to receive legal assistance using the Viber messenger (*text in Ukrainian*)

Interviews and journalism

- Six years ago, in May 2014, the so-called “referendums on self-determination of the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics” took place. How they were organized and why this “self-determination” was not legitimate in the [publication](#) of the magazine “New Time” (*text in Russian*)
- How is [the end of World War II celebrated](#) on both sides of the contact line, and how the memory of the war is [manipulated](#) today by “Radio Liberty” (*text in Russian, Ukrainian*)
- Ukrainian journalist Dmitry Gordon [interviewed](#) Igor Girkin (Strelkov), a colonel in the FSB Reserve of Russia, who commanded the so-called militia, “DNR”. In the course of the interview, Girkin actually admitted his [responsibility](#) for the killings on the territory of the “D/LPR”, as well as “indirect responsibility” for the Boeing MH-17 catastrophe. The publication of the interview caused a negative [negative reaction](#) in Ukrainian areas of social networks. The Russian journalist Ilya Barabanov published an [article](#) analyzing what is the attitude to the figure of Girkin in Russia (*text in Russian, Ukrainian*)

- Radio Liberty publishes the [stories](#) of people to whose murder Igor Girkin actually admitted in an interview (*text in Ukrainian*)
- Hromadske publishes an [interview](#) with journalist Andrey Kulikov about an interview by Dmitry Gordon with Igor Girkin, ethical principles of the media and a trip to occupied Donetsk in 2015 (*audio in Ukrainian*)
- [Interview](#) by NV with Olga Oliker, a political scientist from the United States, about what needs to be done to achieve peace in Donbas (*text in Russian*)
- Interview with Alena Grom, author of photo essays about life in the front-line territories of eastern Ukraine (*text in [Russian](#) and [English](#)*)
- [Residents](#) of front-line villages in Donbas tell how their life has changed since the introduction of quarantine (*text in Russian*)
- “Those who rock the city” - the [story](#) of DJs from front-line Toretsk (*text in Ukrainian*)
- Photos of Donetsk and [testimonies](#) of its residents about 6 years in the conflict zone (*text in Ukrainian*)

About CivilM +

The international CivilM + platform was established in 2017. It unites 19 organizations and three independent experts from Ukraine, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Russia and France. Within the CivilM + network, they contribute to the peaceful resolution of the conflict in Donbas. In particular, they inform their governments and communities about the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine, implement projects in the spheres of peacebuilding, transitional justice, dialogue and human rights. Follow the platform news on CivilM + [Website](#) and [Facebook](#) page.

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The opinions expressed in journalistic materials may not coincide with the opinions of the authors of the newsletter.



You can send your information for inclusion in the newsletter or ask the question: newsletter@civilmplus.org