

HIGHLIGHTS

PULSE OF PEACE IN DONBAS



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ANGELA MERKEL'S VISITS TO RUSSIA AND UKRAINE: PEACE IN EASTERN UKRAINE, INTERNATIONAL NEGOTIATIONS AND NORD STREAM 2

German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Russian President Vladimir Putin met on August 20. The talks lasted for three hours. In addition to Russian-German relations, the agenda of the meeting included international issues related to the situation in Afghanistan, Belarus and Ukraine. According to Putin, Ukraine "adopted a number of bills, which contradict the Minsk agreements. Merkel, for her part, expressed hope that the peace talks will continue in existing formats even when she leaves her post as German chancellor, [AFP reported](#). The German chancellor also advocated that the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, Germany and France hold a meeting on the situation in eastern Ukraine.

Chancellor Merkel expressed the same idea after a meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, which took place two days after Merkel's visit to Moscow. Ukraine's president supported the idea of the leaders meeting, but called on Kiev's Western partners to put pressure on Russia to make progress in resolving the conflict, [AP reported](#). Zelensky said that Ukraine was seeking a permanent ceasefire in the east of the country, an exchange of prisoners, and open crossings on the contact line.

The talks also touched on the question of the pipeline's construction, Nord Stream 2. Merkel said she sees the German-American agreement "as a commitment by the German government to deflect President Zelensky's concerns about using energy as a weapon," [The Washington Post reported](#). She said she takes those concerns very

seriously and pointed to Germany's appointment of a negotiator to help ensure that the agreement to transit gas through Ukraine is extended beyond 2024. Merkel also said at a press conference that she expects the next German government to give Ukraine the same support, pushing for restoration of the country's territorial integrity and allowing it to continue internal reforms. The same appeal was made by participants of the international platform CivilM+ on the eve of Merkel's meetings with the leaders of Russia and Ukraine. The text of the statement is available in [Russian](#), [English](#), and [Ukrainian](#).

DETERIORATION OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL SITUATION IN THE EAST OF UKRAINE

The environmental situation in Donbas is deteriorating – this was [reported](#) by experts of the State Regional Geological Enterprise "Donetskgeologiya". The greatest threat of water and soil pollution is associated with three enterprises in the non-government-controlled part of Donbas – the Yunkom mine, a chemical plant and a mercury mine in Horlivka. At least 49 mines are currently flooded in ORDLO, and there has been no official information on their condition since 2015. In case of negative development of the situation, the population of Donbas in both non-government-controlled and controlled territories could lose the ability to use fresh water.

HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATIONS ASK FOR AID TO PEOPLE LIVING IN DONBAS

Humanitarian programs that help people living along the contact line in eastern Ukraine are less than a third funded – [said](#) Osnat Lubrani, UN Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator in Ukraine. As the cold weather approaches, the situation is becoming increasingly alarming. Ms Lubrani also noted the added strain of the coronavirus pandemic and the increasing number of civilian casualties. [Restrictions of movement across the contact line](#) are also having a negative impact on people - five out of seven entry-exit crossing points on the line of contact are still not operational due to the position of the so-called "L/DNR", and those in operation are often overloaded. Among the most vulnerable groups are pensioners; [according to data from the Accounting Chamber of Ukraine](#), at the beginning of 2021, the debt to pensioners registered in the temporarily uncontrolled parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions is 83 billion UAH, while only 11 billion UAH of this amount can be claimed by those registered in the controlled territory. According to the auditors, the debt arose due to the fact that for three years the government did not approve the procedure for social payments to IDPs.

THE UKRAINIAN DRAFT LAW ON THE POLICY OF TRANSITION WAS PUBLISHED

[The text of the draft law of Ukraine №5844](#) on the state policy of the transition period in the occupied part of Donbas and Crimea was published. Overview of the main provisions of the bill [offer](#) "Donbas Realities".

The document proposes to fix the conditions of elections in these territories after de-occupation. According to the text, no elections or referendums can take place in the temporarily occupied territories. In the de-occupied territories, their organization is possible only if it is possible to ensure non-interference in the electoral process, including by the Russian Federation, respect for the rights of internally displaced persons, the restoration of Ukrainian television and radio broadcasting, as well as the participation of official observers from the OSCE and other international structures. A [sociological survey](#) conducted by the Razumkov Center in all regions of Ukraine in July and August this year showed that the position on elections in the majority of Ukrainian society coincides with the provisions stipulated in this draft law; 60% of survey participants believe that elections in the non-controlled territories of Donbas should be held after the withdrawal of Russian troops and the return of Ukrainian control over these territories.

The text of the draft law on the transition policy also contains the terms of contact of Ukrainian bodies and officials with Russia and its controlled administrations. [According to Oleksiy Arestovych, the speaker of the Ukrainian delegation to the Trilateral Contact Group \(TCG\)](#), the purpose of these provisions is to exclude the possibility of legitimizing Russian-controlled administrations.

RUSSIA CONTINUES ISSUING PASSPORTS TO UKRAINIAN CITIZENS

Between January and June 2021, the Russian Federation granted its citizenship to 184,385 citizens of Ukraine. Also, more than 16,000 people received residence permits. This is [stated](#) in the statistical data on the migration situation of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation. However, this data does not specify what part of the statistics refers to residents of parts of Donbas not controlled by the Ukrainian government. At the same time, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, commenting on the situation with the issuance of passports, [stated](#) that this policy is a continuation of the principle of the right to choose citizenship, and participation in voting in the Russian State Duma elections will not cause problems for residents of Donbas with Russian passports. At the same time, the head of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine Dmytro Razumkov believes that the authorities must work to return people to Ukraine, including those who left Donbas. [During a briefing](#), he commented on an earlier interview by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, in which he expressed the opinion that residents of occupied Donbas who feel like Russians should go to Russia.

THE STRATEGY OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF DONBAS UNTIL 2030 HAS BEEN APPROVED

The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine has [approved](#) a strategy for the economic development of Donetsk and Luhansk regions for the period until 2030. The document deals with the government-controlled territory, to which they expect to attract investors. The strategy is based on the application of the territory of priority development model, the use of tax and financial incentives, including the insurance

of military and political risks, the development of critical infrastructure and the regional labor market.

Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine Oleksiy Reznikov noted that after de-occupation, the strategy can be scaled up to the temporarily occupied territories. At the same time, after de-occupation, it will not be possible to [restore](#) the economy of certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions to the pre-war level.

The main result of the implementation of the strategy should be "ensuring the growth of people's living standards and the formation of capable communities.