

## HIGHLIGHTS

# PULSE OF PEACE IN DONBAS



August 27 – September 2, 2021

### THE RESULTS OF THE MEETING BETWEEN THE PRESIDENTS OF THE UNITED STATES AND UKRAINE

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and U.S. President Joe Biden met in Washington, D.C., and issued a joint [statement](#). It notes that the U.S. confirms its full support for international efforts to resolve the conflict in accordance with international law, including the efforts invested within the Normandy format. One of the goals of interaction between the two countries is to hold the government of the Russian Federation responsible for its aggression. Specific steps for strategic cooperation in security and defense, including the implementation of the Strategic Defense Framework Agreement and bilateral military-technical cooperation in the areas of democracy, human rights and justice, energy security and economic growth, are also [described](#). Minsk agreements have not been mentioned in the statement.

Before the summit, the letter of Ukrainian reformers, public activists and former deputies of the Verkhovna Rada to the US President was [published](#), in which they recalled Joe Biden's pre-election promises to act to stop the implementation of the Nord Stream-2 project. A statement following the meeting confirmed the U.S. intention to continue the course of energy diplomacy, which aims to prevent Russia from using energy as a geopolitical weapon.

The Head of the Ukrainian presidential office, Andriy Yermak [said](#) that the issue of rejecting the Minsk format of negotiations on Donbas or replacing it with another format had not been discussed during the meeting. Also, based on its results, the U.S. [announced](#) an assistance package to Ukraine, which includes defense

equipment worth 60 million USD to better defend Ukraine against Russian aggression. By the end of the year, Washington also plans to allocate 463 million USD to Kyiv for the implementation of reforms and 45 million USD as humanitarian aid because of the conflict in Donbas. Although, [according to the Atlantic Council](#), the meeting helped steer relations between Ukraine and the U.S. in the right direction, it failed in a number of respects: for example, the U.S. did not take a more decisive position on Ukraine joining NATO. More details about the course of the meeting – in the [report](#) on "Suspilne". The Kremlin negatively [reacted](#) to the information about U.S. aid, expressing concern that military assistance could worsen the conflict in Donbas. Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova [announced](#) her intention to seek an embargo on arms supplies to Ukraine.

## ESCALATION IN DONBAS

[Commenting on the intensified shelling in Donbas in late August](#), the Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine Dmytro Razumkov [criticized](#) the work of the OSCE SMM. In a response, OSCE SMM Head Yaşar Halit Çevik [stressed](#) that the SMM counts on the political support of the actors in the field, and unwarranted public criticism has a detrimental effect on the mission's work. He emphasized that the mission monitors around the clock through patrols and remote monitoring, while the freedom of movement of the mission is regularly restricted, and also pointed out that the SMM has neither the mandate nor the capacity to cover the entire conflict zone in Donbas.

## MISSING PERSONS IN DONBAS: EXACT NUMBER UNKNOWN

On August 30, Ukraine marked the International Day of Missing Persons, on which victims of enforced disappearances were remembered. [According to the Verkhovna Rada Commissioner for Human Rights](#), 258 people, including 67 military persons, are reported missing from the temporarily occupied territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. [According to the International Committee of the Red Cross](#), the number is much higher: the fate of more than 800 people in Donbas alone remains unknown. At the same time, implementation of the norms of the law "On the Legal Status of Missing Persons" adopted in 2018 has not begun, nor has the Unified Registry of Missing Persons been established, which is necessary to ensure an effective search. Civil society organizations remind about the situation of victims of enforced disappearances, for example, the exhibition "[Wall of Hope: Mothers of Forgotten Sons](#)" opened in Dnipro, organized by the Association of Relatives of the Disappeared "Nadezhda".

TCG: WORK OF SUBGROUPS, DISCUSSION OF RELAUNCHING FACE-TO-FACE MEETINGS

A security subgroup of the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) [held](#) an extraordinary meeting on September 1 due to the deteriorating situation in the conflict zone. The parties discussed ceasefire violations and the work of the coordination mechanism to prevent them. "The position of the Ukrainian delegation that the security subgroup should be a part of the coordination mechanism and a means for the parties to verify ceasefire violations was confirmed in practice," the Ukrainian delegation said.

On September 2, the TCG [held](#) its first meeting of an expert working group on environmental issues related to the flooding of mines along the contact line in Donbas. It was decided to prepare a list of flooded mines that would be the focus of the working group. The results will be used in the work of the TCG subgroup on social and environmental issues to identify funding mechanisms for technical projects to prevent the environmental risks associated with mine flooding.

At the same time, [according to the special representative of the OSCE Chairman in Ukraine and the TCG, Mikko Kinnunen](#), the sides of the TCG agree to return to the face-to-face negotiation format. However, the venue of the meetings has not been determined. The speaker of the Ukrainian side in the TCG, Oleksiy Arestovych, [suggests](#) choosing a neutral country, such as Switzerland or Austria, for holding negotiations in case of returning to the face-to-face format. On the risks of resuming face-to-face meetings and transferring them to another location – in the article by [Donbas Realiij](#). Minister for Reintegration of the Occupied Territories of Ukraine Oleksiy Reznikov, who currently serves as the Head of the Ukrainian delegation to the TCG, [expressed the opinion](#) that consultations in the Trilateral Contact Group on resolving the conflict in Donbas were currently yielding no results, but they must be maintained for the sake of the possibility of releasing Ukrainian citizens detained in Donbas.

## RISK OF NON-EXTENSION OF THE OSCE MISSION MANDATE ON THE UKRAINIAN-RUSSIAN BORDER

Russia announced its rejection to vote for extending the mandate of the OSCE mission on the Russian-Ukrainian border in the Rostov Region (Gukovo and Donetsk checkpoints), [Radio Liberty correspondent Rickard Jozwiak reported](#). Because of Russia's similar position, the OSCE Permanent Council has already extended the mandate of the monitoring mission twice for only two months. The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry issued a [statement](#) condemning the decision, noting that it sees it as evidence of plans to continue and increase arms supplies to the so-called "L/DNR," and demanding that Russia stops destructive actions against the OSCE monitoring mission. The current mandate of the OSCE mission expires on September 30. The [statement of the Ukrainian delegation of the TCG](#) called this Russian decision a deliberate sabotage of the implementation of the Minsk agreements in the context of other actions aimed at blocking progress in the TCG consultations, and it was also criticized in the [published statement of the US mission to the OSCE](#). Oleksiy Arestovych, speaker of the Ukrainian delegation to the TCG, [calling Russia's actions](#)

[a "demarche."](#) said that Ukraine would seek to impose additional anti-Russian sanctions.