

HIGHLIGHTS

PULSE OF PEACE IN DONBAS



3–9 September, 2021

BLOCKING OF THE OSCE MISSION: REACTIONS

The Russian Foreign Ministry [commented](#) on the refusal to vote for extending the mandate of the OSCE mission on the Russian border with Ukraine, saying that the activity of observers "does not have a positive impact on the settlement" of the conflict in Donbas and is "inexpedient". [According to Ukraine's permanent representative to international organizations in Vienna Yevhen Tsybaliuk](#), the OSCE border mission to the temporarily uncontrolled part of the border with Russia (Hukove and Donetsk checkpoints), whose mandate extension is currently being blocked by Russia, during its activity has recorded the movement of almost 40,000 people in military uniform through the uncontrolled part of the Ukrainian border with Russia. He noted that Ukraine and its international partners will continue to press Russia to implement the Minsk agreements, which envisage ensuring permanent monitoring and verification of the state border between Ukraine and Russia by the OSCE.

Minister for Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine Oleksiy Reznikov [expressed concern](#) about the situation, calling Russia's actions "a complex tactic to hide illegal military activities in the occupied territories" and noting that blocking the work of the mission could be a precedent for attacks on other OSCE mandates, in particular the work of the Special Monitoring Mission (SMM).

PREPARING FOR THE ELECTIONS TO RUSSIAN STATE DUMA IN NON-GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED AREAS OF DONETSK AND LUHANSK REGIONS

The so-called "DPR" [held a forum](#) called "Defenders of Russia," which was positioned as a "congress of veterans". The event was in support of the Russian party of power "Edinaya Rossiya". The spokesperson of the RF President Dmitry Peskov [said](#) that veterans not affiliated with the Russian armed forces have always been on the territory of Donbas, and that the "congress of veterans" was not an official event.

The party "Edinaya Rossiya" also [held a meeting](#) in Donetsk attended by the secretary of its general council, Andrei Turchak. [According to him](#), there are about 4,000 supporters of the party who have Russian passports living in ORDLO (Ukrainian abbreviation to refer to the certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions that are not controlled by the Ukrainian government). "Donbas Reali" [offers](#) a brief overview of the situation in the so-called "L/DPR" ahead of the elections to the Russian State Duma.

On September 8, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine [adopted](#) a resolution acknowledging it is illegal to involve residents of the occupied parts of Donbas and Crimea to vote in the Russian State Duma elections. The parliamentarians appealed to the international community to recognize these elections as illegitimate and impose additional sanctions on Russia.

On the same day, the Council of Permanent Representatives of the EU member states [decided](#) to extend personal visa and economic sanctions [against](#) 177 Russian persons and 48 legal entities for the next six months for actions undermining the sovereignty and independence of Ukraine.

HEARINGS IN THE CASE OF THE MH17 PLANE CRASH RESUMED

On September 6, the trial in the case of downing of the MH17 flight [renewed](#) in the Netherlands. At this trial stage, the court will hear the relatives of those who died in the crash. For the first time in the history of the country more than 90 people will appeal to the court – the Netherlands called this process "historic and unprecedented". Earlier in September, the Joint Investigation Team (JIT) [appealed](#) to residents of Kursk, Russia, and [military personnel](#) stationed in the area to share information about those involved in the shooting down of the airplane. The verdict is expected to be announced at the end of 2022. More information about the hearing is available in a [material](#) by 'Graty', Ukrainian court reporting project.

DISCUSSION ON THE NEGOTIATIONS IN THE NORMANDY FORMAT

On September 8, a videoconference of the advisors of the Normandy format leaders took place. [According to Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba](#), the purpose of

the meeting was to set the date for the talks at the ministerial level. He also expressed hope that Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov would confirm his participation. At the same time, Sergey Lavrov [considers](#) holding a meeting "inexpedient". A few days earlier, the head of the Office of the President of Ukraine, Andriy Yermak, [said](#) that the United States agreed to participate in the negotiations to resolve the conflict in Donbas, noting that the expansion of the Normandy format requires the consent of all parties. Experts' opinions on such a possibility are [contradictory](#). For example, former U.S. Special Representative to Ukraine Kurt Volker [believes](#) that although the involvement of the United States in resolving the conflict in Donbas is necessary, they will not be officially invited to join the negotiations, but have the opportunity to contribute to the resolution of the conflict in Donbas informally.

COVID-19: SITUATION DETERIORATING IN DONETSK REGION

According to the Department of Health of the Donetsk Regional State Administration, the spread of the "Delta" variant has been confirmed in the region – a sample study of patients [gave](#) a positive result in 96%. It is [reported](#) that the number of hospitalizations due to COVID-19 has also continued to rise since the end of August. Although at the moment the region is in the "green" zone in terms of the level of epidemic danger, the Donetsk Regional State Administration [says](#) that the level of morbidity is getting critical.