

## HIGHLIGHTS

# PULSE OF PEACE IN DONBAS



10–16 September, 2021

### ELECTIONS TO THE RUSSIAN STATE DUMA: PARTICIPATION OF DONBAS RESIDENTS

On 17-19 September, the elections to the State Duma (parliament) of the Russian Federation took place. As [reported](#) by the media, quoting the head of the Commission on international cooperation on human rights, nearly 150,000 of Donbas residents who hold Russian passports participated in the remote voting process.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba [said](#) that this would be documented as a violation of international law. Oleksiy Arestovych, adviser to the Ukrainian delegation to the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG), [notes](#) that such actions by Russia are a *de-facto* recognition of control over these territories, and in this regard, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky will [address the UN General Assembly](#). The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry [condemned](#) the actions of Russia, stressing that people involved in the organization of the elections would be held accountable in line with Ukrainian law, and urged other states and international organizations not to recognize the election results and to increase pressure on Russia, in particular through sanctions.

The so-called "DNR" [called](#) participation in the elections "another step toward integrating Donbas into the Russian Federation", and organized special bus and train trips to the Rostov region. At the same time, the so-called "L/DNR" [restricted](#) the operation of checkpoints in the direction of Russia during the election period, in particular for residents of non-government-controlled territory holding Ukrainian passports. Other measures were applied to force people to vote, as [described in a Radio Liberty report](#). Expectations and potential consequences of Donbas residents'

participation in the Russian elections are analysed in the [latest issue of the Civicmonitoring newsletter](#).

## SHELLING IN DONBAS INTENSIFIES

During the first half of September, the number of ceasefire violations in Donbas increased by about 30 percent compared to August, [noted](#) Ambassador Mikko Kinnunen, Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine and in the TCG. He reported that 11 civilians were killed as a result of the conflict in August, the highest monthly number since the agreement to strengthen the ceasefire came into force in July 2020.

The shelling of civilian infrastructure has also intensified. Humanitarian workers in Donbas [emphasized](#) that civilians are particularly affected. The Joint Center for Control and Coordination [calls](#) the shelling on September 11-12 one of the most intensive in the past five years. The escalation continues against the backdrop of political statements, particularly from [Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky](#) and the [commander-in-chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, Valery Zaluzhny](#), about the possibility of a full-scale war with Russia. Among the long-term factors influencing the deterioration of the situation is the expansion of the Russian military presence in Belarus. The opinions of Donbas residents are presented in a [report by Donbas Realii](#).

## EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT PASSED A RESOLUTION CALLING RUSSIA 'THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE' TO EUROPEAN SECURITY

On September 16, the European Parliament [passed](#) a resolution describing key positions in the EU-Russia relations. Its adoption was [preceded by a debate](#) in the plenary session two days earlier.

The resolution defines freedom, stability and peace in Europe and beyond as the main interest of the EU, which are threatened by the aggressive politics of the Russian authorities. Russia under the leadership of the president Vladimir Putin is called "the biggest challenge to European security". Taking into account Russia's current National Defense Strategy, which officially declares an anti-Western vector of Russian politics, the resolution contains recommendations for the EU to develop a strategy towards Russia, in particular, strengthening defense, further application of extended sanctions, and disconnecting Russia from the SWIFT payment system.

One of the goals of the policy is to increase EU energy independence: the resolution calls for a stop to the launch of the Nord Stream-2 pipeline. To improve energy security, the deputies call for synchronizing the power grids of all member states and preventing a new expansion of Russian nuclear energy in the EU.

A large block of the document is dedicated to Russia's actions undermining security in Europe, particularly in the context of its aggression against Ukraine. The resolution notes the need to put pressure on Russia for constructive engagement in the

Normandy format, as well as for the Russian government to fulfill its obligations under the Minsk agreements. In particular, the pressure could be exercised by expanding sanctions for the illegal issuance of Russian passports and organizing illegal elections in occupied Crimea.

The resolution also calls on the EU not to recognize the Russian parliament and to consider expelling Russia from international organizations, in particular from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, if the parliamentary elections on 17-19 September are held with violations. [Ukrayinskaya Pravda](#) and [Deutsche Welle](#) offer an analysis of the resolution.

## CONSTRUCTION COMPLETED: REACTIONS TO 'NORD STREAM 2'

On September 10, the Russian gas monopoly Gazprom [announced](#) the completion of the pipeline. Volodimir Zelensky [signed](#) an executive order to establish a working group in relation to the implementation of the 'Nord Stream 2 project'. The group is mandated to prepare proposals on measures to prevent and minimize the negative consequences of the construction of gas pipelines bypassing Ukraine and develop proposals to reduce certain threats in the security and energy spheres.

[According to the head of the Office of the President of Ukraine Andrii Yermak](#), who will chair the working group, the issue of 'Nord Stream-2' and the transit of Russian gas through Ukrainian territory should be discussed in the Normandy format as related to the security of the country and the region. Amos Hochstein, senior adviser on energy security at the U.S. Department of State [expressed concern](#) about European energy dependence on Russian gas supplies and the possible energy crisis at the onset of winter, noting that the matter is not about geopolitics, but about human lives.

## RUSSIA INSISTS ON DISCUSSING AN ACTION PLAN OF THE SO-CALLED 'L/DPR' IN THE TCG

On 15 September, a regular meeting of the TCG [was held](#). The Ukrainian delegation urged the Russian side to speed up the exchange of detainees, unblock the operation of checkpoints and return to observance of the "silence" regime in Donbas. Participants of the subgroup on socio-economic and environmental issues used the results of the first meeting of the Expert Group on Environmental Risks related to the flooding of mines along the contact line and continued to work on organizing a visit of IAEA inspectors to the ORDLO with security guarantees. They also discussed remote identification mechanisms for paying pensions to people with low mobility who cannot cross the contact line in Donbas.

[According to Serhiy Garmash, a member of the Ukrainian delegation to the TCG](#), the work of the TCG humanitarian subgroup was blocked by the Russian side, which did not agree to discuss the implementation of the "Steinmeier formula," on which it had

previously insisted. Instead, it was proposed to discuss an "action plan" of the so-called "L/DPR", to which the Ukrainian delegation did not agree.

## ADOPTED THE DRAFT OF THE STATE BUDGET OF UKRAINE FOR 2022

On September 15, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine [approved](#) the draft state budget for 2022. The largest expenditures are [foreseen](#) for social protection (UAH 320.1 bn) and the army (UAH 319.4 bn). Funding for housing programs for veterans and displaced persons will be increased to over 3 billion UAH. In addition, the draft budget [includes](#) expenditures for reintegration measures for young people from the temporarily occupied territories, political prisoners, mine action and improving the crossing conditions to and from non-government-controlled areas.