

HIGHLIGHTS

PULSE OF PEACE IN DONBAS



24–30 September, 2021

COVID-19 IN DONBAS: THE SITUATION IS WORSENING

The situation with COVID-19 in the non-government-controlled parts of Donbas is getting worse. The so-called "DPR" [informs](#) that hospitals are filled to their maximum capacity with many patients in severe condition. They [claim](#) that about 200,000 residents have been vaccinated against COVID-19.

[According to the reports by human rights organizations](#), not enough tests are being made in the temporarily occupied territory of Ukraine, and there is a lack of doctors and medical personnel.

Since the information about the impact of mass events on the spread of the infection is [not revealed](#), the responsibility is [placed on people](#) and the new restrictions are imposed. In Donetsk and Luhansk regions under the control of Ukrainian authorities, more than [480,000 jobs](#) have been made, and almost 300,000 people have completed a full course of vaccination.

[As of the end of September](#), the hospitals designated to treat COVID-19 patients in Donetsk region are more than a half full, with the situation in Luhansk region being the same. Although both Luhansk and Donetsk regions were in the ["yellow" zone](#) as of the end of September, experts from the Center for Health Economics at Kyiv School of Economics [note](#) a high probability of Luhansk oblast shifting to a "red" level and recommended to impose relevant preventive restrictions.

RUSSIAN FUNDING FOR "L/DPR" WILL REACH 900 BILLION RUBLES (10 BILLION EURO) - SAYS MEDIA REPORT

Russia plans to allocate more than 900 billion rubles (about 330 billion UAH) over the next three years for the social and economic needs of the temporarily non-government-controlled part of Donbas. 'Radio Liberty' [speaks about](#) the details of the Russian "Program for Accelerated Socio-Economic Development of the Territories for 2022-2024". According to internal Russian data, cited by journalists, nearly 2.9 million people live on the temporarily occupied territory; 38% of them are pensioners. It is noted that the military component of the maintenance of the so-called "L/DPR" is financed separately. According to the representatives of Ukrainian security agencies who commented on this journalist investigation, these actions are aimed at the full integration of the occupied Donbas into the Russian economy. Andrii Dikhtyarenko, a Ukrainian journalist and an editor-in-chief of the online media 'Realnaya Gazeta' [notes](#) that this process has been going on for a long time to curb the growing dissatisfaction of the local residents. 'Donbass Realii' [analyzes](#) how Russia has built a management system of the so-called "L/DPR" and which structures are responsible for the financing.

NORMANDY FOUR MEETING: WILL MERKEL STILL ATTEND?

Ukraine, Germany and France are [considering](#) options for holding a Normandy Four summit with the participation of the about-to-leave Chancellor Angela Merkel and the new Chancellor of Germany, said Oleksiy Reznikov, the vice-prime-minister and the Minister for the Reintegration of the Occupied Territories of Ukraine. France and Germany have agreed to hold the meeting, and the participation of Vladimir Putin is being discussed. One of the main topics of the summit will be the implementation of the agreements reached during the previous meeting in Paris in 2019.

If the summit is held with the participation of Chancellor Angela Merkel, its decisions and commitments will remain relevant to the new German government, [stressed](#) Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba.

Andrii Yermak, head of the Office of the President of Ukraine, [noted](#) that active consultations on the organization of a meeting in the Normandy format are currently underway.

A spokesperson of the Russian President Dmitry Peskov once again [criticized](#) the preparations and said that the Normandy Four summit "for the sake of the summit" was undesirable.

At the same time, experts have [different opinions](#) regarding possible changes in Germany's policy priorities and the likelihood of a meeting in the Normandy format.

THE WORK OF THE HUMANITARIAN SUBGROUP OF THE TCG IS RESTORED, THE POSSIBILITY OF MEETINGS IN PERSON IS DISCUSSED

On September 29, a [meeting](#) of the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) was held, after which the minister for reintegration of the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, Oleksiy Reznikov, reported that the work of the humanitarian subgroup had been restored. The need to unblock the crossing points from the side of the temporarily occupied territories was on the agenda.

[According to Serhiy Garmash](#), ORDLO representative from Ukraine to the TCG, although the Ukrainian side provided the security guarantees, the so-called “L/DPR” voiced other pretence. During the meeting, the Ukrainian delegation continued to insist on the prompt release of all illegally detained Ukrainian citizens. The subgroup on social and economic issues discussed water supply problems on both sides of the contact line, as well as organizing a visit of IAEA inspectors to the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. The speaker of the Ukrainian delegation to the TCG, Oleksiy Arestovych, [announced](#) plans to hold the visit in the next three months.

[According to Andriy Kostin](#), a representative of the Ukrainian side in the political subgroup of the TCG, Ukraine supports a return to the in-person format of the TCG negotiations, but not in Minsk, and consultations are already underway. According to him, the key point is the confidentiality of the negotiations.

UKRAINE: A BILL TO PROTECT POLITICAL PRISONERS

On 27 September, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy [submitted](#) to the Verkhovna Rada a [draft law](#) "On social and legal protection of persons who have been detained as a result of the armed aggression against Ukraine and members of their families". It provides for the establishment of the Commission, which determines the fact of deprivation of liberty on appropriate grounds, and defines its powers. The head of state also proposed changes to the Tax Code and the Code of Administrative Offences related to this bill. The law may be [adopted](#) by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine in early 2022.