

HIGHLIGHTS

PULSE OF PEACE IN DONBAS



8–17 October, 2021

OSCE SMM SUSPENDED OPERATIONS IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES OF DONBAS – MONITORS BLOCKED IN A HOTEL IN DONETSK

On 17 October, the OSCE [suspended](#) its monitoring mission to eastern Ukraine after protests near its headquarters in Donetsk, said Yaşar Halit Çevik, the head of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine.

According to the OSCE SMM [report](#) of October 16, on October 15, between 50 and 100 people, mostly young men, gathered near the hotel where the SMM monitors live. According to media reports, people who referred to themselves as protesters, came to the building with anti-Ukrainian slogans and aggressive messages against the OSCE activities. The people were demanding the release of Andrei Kosyak, a member of the armed groups of the so-called "LPR" who had been detained by the Ukrainian military on October 13.

Pro-Russian protesters blocked the entrance to the hotel in Donetsk. Representatives of the Ukrainian delegation to the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) [called](#) the incident "hostage-taking" and viewed the blocking of the hotel with the monitors as "a systemic undermining of the authority of the Mission and a consistent and deliberate policy aimed at forcing the OSCE out of the occupied territories".

NO AGREEMENT REACHED ON A NORMANDY SUMMIT; NEGOTIATIONS AT THE LEVEL OF FOREIGN MINISTERS ARE POSSIBLE

On October 11, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, French President Emmanuel Macron, and German Chancellor Angela Merkel [discussed](#) in a video conference format the situation with the achievement of peace in Donbas. In particular, they discussed preparations for a summit in the Normandy format. The parties agreed that the next summit should cover the results of the implementation of the commitments made by the parties during the meeting in Paris in 2019. Later, in a telephone conversation, Emmanuel Macron and Angela Merkel [discussed](#) with Russian President Vladimir Putin the possibility of holding the summit. They agreed to prepare a meeting of foreign ministers and to review the prerequisites and feasibility of possible negotiations between the heads of states. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov [criticized](#) the insistence of Germany and France on organizing a meeting in the Normandy format, saying that they should focus on ensuring Ukraine's implementation of the 2019 summit decisions. The spokesman of the Russian President Dmitry Peskov [said](#) that during the talks it was decided to intensify preparations for the meeting and hold consultations at the level of foreign ministers, but refused to comment on the prospects for the summit, noting that they would be clear after the meeting of foreign ministers. At the same time, the agenda of a possible meeting between the presidents of Ukraine and Russia will differ from the agenda of the Normandy Four summit, which is limited to the "Minsk Package of Measures," according to Dmitry Peskov.

The Russian media Kommersant [quoted](#) its sources as saying that no agreement had been reached on holding the summit, and it had been decided to limit the negotiations to the foreign ministers of Germany, Ukraine, Russia and France.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba noted that there was still no certainty about the meeting at the level of foreign ministers, and the Ukrainian side was waiting for a signal that Russia was ready for it.

UKRAINE-EU SUMMIT: RUSSIA MUST ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE CONFLICT IN DONBAS; UKRAINE CALLS FOR EXPANDED SANCTIONS

On October 12, Kyiv [hosted](#) the 23rd Ukraine-EU summit dedicated to the prospects of cooperation between Ukraine and the EU in the implementation of the Association Agreement, ensuring energy security and deepening sectoral cooperation. The agenda also [included](#) issues of security cooperation, as well as the development of the situation in Donbas. A number of documents were [signed](#) after the summit, including a joint statement by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, President of the European Council Charles Michel and President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen. In the statement, Ukraine and the European Union called on Russia to fully recognize its responsibility for the conflict in Donbas and to use its considerable influence on the armed formations of the so-called "L/DPR" which it supports, to facilitate a ceasefire and the implementation of the Minsk agreements. The parties reaffirmed their full support for the efforts of the Normandy format, the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG), and the OSCE, including its Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) to Ukraine. In addition, the statement noted that the duration of the EU sanctions remains clearly conditioned on the full implementation of the Minsk

agreements. During a meeting with the media following the summit, Volodymyr Zelenski said that he [called](#) for increased sanctions pressure from the European Union and the extension of these measures to all those who took part in organizing the Russian State Duma elections in the temporarily non-government-controlled part of Donbas, and that summit participants agreed to increase efforts to release Ukrainian citizens illegally detained by Russia. In a press statement, the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen [stressed](#) that the EU continues to fully support the implementation of the Minsk agreements, the Ukrainian government's position on peace in Donbas, and calls on Russia to take responsibility as a party to the conflict.

THE "LPR" RESTRICTS CROSSING THE CONTACT LINE REFERRING TO "ANTI-EPIDEMIC" MEASURES

The so-called "LPR" has tightened the rules for crossing a checkpoint in Stanytsia Luhanska. Now it is only possible to travel to the territory under the control of Ukrainian government if there are certain reasons for travelling; these measures are [called](#) "anti-epidemic". Ukrainian human rights organizations [note](#) that the real reasons for this ban are political.

On 13 October, during the negotiations in the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG), Ukraine [proposed](#) to increase opportunities for vaccination of pensioners and other citizens at the crossing point in Stanytsia Luhanska. However, the Russian side did not agree to consider any measures that would allow pensioners to cross the line of contact and refused to open this and other checkpoints.

A member of the Ukrainian delegation to the TCG, Sergey Garmash, [reported](#) that the work of the TCG humanitarian subgroup was disrupted by Russia, which again invited Maya Pirogova, a member of the so-called "DPR" convicted of terrorism in Ukraine, to the meeting in order not to discuss the COVID-19 situation in the non-government-controlled territories of Donbas. Meanwhile, Russia's representative in the Trilateral Contact Group Boris Gryzlov [stated](#) that the political dialogue was stalled by the Ukrainian side, which refuses to negotiate with the so-called "D/LPR".

On October 13, quarantine measures [were strengthened](#) in the so-called "LPR", in particular, restaurants were closed, public events and personal reception at institutions were prohibited. Reportedly, these measures were introduced due to the critical situation with the spread of COVID-19. [According to Ukrainian media Novosti Donbasa](#), a similar situation is observed in the temporarily non-government-controlled part of the Donetsk region, with the number of COVID-19 and pneumonia cases exceeding the local healthcare system's capacity to provide outpatient and inpatient care. Both Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts are [classified](#) by the Ministry of Health of Ukraine as "orange" zones, with a high probability of their [further transition to the "red" zone](#).

DMITRY MEDVEDEV'S ARTICLE ABOUT THE POLICY TOWARDS UKRAINE

Dmitry Medvedev, deputy head of the Russian Security Council, published an [article](#) on Russia's policy toward Ukraine. In his opinion, contacts with the Ukrainian leadership are pointless. He declared Ukraine's complete dependence on the United States and the EU, stressing that at the moment it makes no sense for Russia to undertake any measures to restore a dialogue. Responsibility for the collapse of bilateral relations is placed entirely on Ukraine, and the efforts of the Ukrainian government to protect the country are presented as irrational anti-Russian actions. Although the article is subtitled "polemical theses," the spokesperson of Russian president Dmitry Peskov [noted](#) that the Kremlin shares the views and wording it contained.

Commenting on the article, Peter Dickinson (Atlantic Council) [notes](#) that it is written in "highly inflammatory" language and focuses on the emotionally charged topic of World War II, while completely avoiding the much more uncomfortable and relevant topic of Russia's eight-year-long aggression against Ukraine. In his view, the content of Medvedev's article, as well as the earlier one of Vladimir Putin, indicates that one of the key factors to their writing is the Russian authorities' desire to avoid responsibility for the collapse of Russian influence in Ukraine. He notes that the publication is an extremely disturbing signal to all those who aim to resolve the conflict in eastern Ukraine through negotiations.

PROJECT "DIFFERENT PATHS, COMMON DESTINY"

The project "[Different Paths, Common Destiny](#)" presented five video monologues about the experience of displacement and integration of people who became internally displaced due to the war in eastern Ukraine. Its creators note that while it's important to report about the problems and misfortunes of those who were forced to move to other regions of Ukraine because of military actions, it is equally valuable to talk about what these people bring to their new communities and Ukrainian society as a whole. Successful integration is not just about finding new housing or having a decent job; it's about being able to build new social connections and understand one's significance for a community, and this can also [motivate](#) people living in non-government-controlled territory of Ukraine. According to the protagonists of the project, success means having an opportunity not to give up under the pressure of circumstances and not to lose the vision of the future in Ukraine.

