

HIGHLIGHTS

PULSE OF PEACE IN DONBAS



12–18 November, 2021

EU AND NATO READY TO SUPPORT UKRAINE IN CASE OF ESCALATION OF THE SITUATION ON THE BORDER WITH RUSSIA

On November 12, a [meeting of the Security Cooperation Council \(SCC\)](#) at the level of foreign and defense ministers of France and Russia was held, one of the topics of the meeting was the situation around Ukraine and new movements of Russian troops near its border. The French side expressed concern about the deteriorating security situation in Ukraine and warned of the serious consequences of any possible attacks on Ukraine's territorial integrity, calling on Russia to return to the organization of the Normandy format ministerial meeting and recalling its commitments regarding transparency of military movements and activities in accordance with OSCE requirements.

On November 14, Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba and European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell [held a meeting](#) on the security situation in Donbas and on the Ukrainian-Russian border. Dmytro Kuleba called on the European Union to take political and other measures to deter Russia from further aggressive actions.

On November 15, at a press conference after negotiations with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmitry Kuleba, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg [voiced](#) NATO's intention to prevent escalation on the border with Ukraine and warned the Russian Federation against aggressive actions.

On 16 November, at a press conference following a meeting of the EU Defence Council, Josep Borrell [said](#) that the existing association agreement between Ukraine

and the EU did not provide for a defence alliance, but Ukraine could still rely on political, diplomatic, economic and financial assistance from the EU if the situation on the borders deteriorated. A study on possible strategies of the West to contain Russia is [published](#) by the British Chatham House Institute.

THE RUSSIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY PUBLISHED CORRESPONDENCE WITH GERMANY AND FRANCE ON THE NORMANDY FORMAT

The Russian Foreign Ministry [published](#) confidential diplomatic correspondence between Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and French and German Foreign Ministers Jean-Yves Le Drian and Heiko Maas regarding preparations for the Normandy format summit. The [purpose](#) of the publication was to "prevent speculation" about Russia's approach to holding a meeting in the Normandy format. The published letters show that in its version of the final statement of a possible Normandy format ministerial meeting, Russia proposes to call the armed conflict in Donbas an "internal Ukrainian conflict," and to place the rights and responsibilities for its resolution on the Ukrainian authorities and the so-called "L/DPR". The response of the German and French foreign ministers stressed that the Russian proposals cannot be guaranteed to be accepted in the Normandy format and criticized the absence of mention of the importance of fulfilling the mandate of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) on the entire territory of Ukraine.

The [French](#) and [German](#) foreign ministries criticized the publication of the correspondence by the Russian Foreign Ministry, noting that it violated diplomatic rules and practices and urged Russia to continue discussions in the approved formats and on agreed principles.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba [believes](#) that Russia thus demonstrates its disinterest in the negotiations in the Normandy format and ultimately seeks to make them impossible. Dmytro Kuleba stressed that Ukraine together with Germany and France would continue to insist on Russia's involvement in the negotiation process and its participation in the settlement of the conflict.

Foreign Ministry, [said](#) that Russia did not refuse to participate in the Normandy format negotiations and in the work of the Trilateral Contact Group, while accusing France and Germany of "indulging" Ukraine.

However, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov [argues](#) that a meeting in the Normandy format can only take place when Ukraine secures the "special status" of Donbas in the constitution and holds an amnesty and elections in agreement with the so-called "L/DPR". The thesis that Kyiv should start a dialogue with the so-called "L/DPR" was also [voiced](#) by Boris Gryzlov, head of the Russian delegation to the Trilateral Contact Group.

The publication caused a resonance in Ukrainian society. Thus, Konstantin Yeliseyev, who headed the foreign policy direction in the administration of Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, [notes](#) that France and Germany have a clear pro-Ukrainian position on Russia's role in the conflict in Donbas, and stresses the serious risks of any bilateral contacts between Kyiv and Moscow. He also forecasts

that there will be no meetings in the Normandy format until the next presidential election in Ukraine. Sergei Sidorenko, editor of European Pravda, [voiced](#) a similar position in his article.

BELLINGCAT INVESTIGATION: UKRAINIAN SPECIAL OPERATION TO DETAIN RUSSIAN MERCENARIES

The international group of investigative journalists Bellingcat [published](#) the results of the investigation about the disruption of the Ukrainian special operation to detain Russian mercenaries from the private military company "Wagner". The investigation found that the operation of the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine (MDI) was conducted in summer 2020 with the support of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) against people involved in serious crimes and in the conflict in eastern Ukraine on the side of the so-called "L/DPR" supported by Russia. It was planned to lure them out of Russia on the pretext of allegedly serving in South America, and to arrest them in Kiev, landing a plane with mercenaries on board there. However, a ceasefire agreement had been reached in Donbas a few days earlier, to take effect on July 27, which, according to journalists, prompted the Ukrainian presidential office to postpone the operation by five days. As a consequence of the disrupted operation, the mercenaries were arrested in Belarus and subsequently returned to Russia. It is noted that the political consequences of these events continue to be felt more than a year later, and the investigation does not give a clear answer from the Ukrainian officials responsible for the failure of the operation. From the Bellingcat report it follows that despite the actual failure of the operation, during it the Ukrainian special services managed to accumulate a huge amount of information about the participants of the military actions in Donbas. A summary of the essence of the investigation is [offered](#) by the BBC.

The Prosecutor General of Ukraine Iryna Venediktova [noted](#) that the data obtained by Bellingcat would be included in the investigation of Ukrainian investigative bodies. Expert comments on the Bellingcat publication are [offered](#) by Radio Liberty.

RUSSIA SIMPLIFIES CONDITIONS FOR IMPORTING GOODS FROM THE "L/DPR"

Russian President Vladimir Putin has [signed](#) a decree on the provision of humanitarian support to the population of certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine, instructing the government within a month to ease conditions for the admission to Russian markets of goods manufactured in the temporarily uncontrolled by the Ukrainian government part of Donbas. This includes the participation of such goods in state procurements on a par with Russian goods. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba [said](#) during a briefing that this decree contradicts the Minsk agreements and is aimed at further economic integration of the

temporarily non-government-controlled parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine with the economy of the Russian Federation. The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry [presented](#) Russia with a note of protest, noting that it considers this decree as a gross interference in the internal affairs of Ukraine, a violation of its legislation and international law, in addition, its adoption contradicts Russia's commitments under the Minsk agreements and the Normandy format agreements, undermining the efforts of Germany, France and Ukraine to resume the productive work of these platforms.

German Foreign Ministry spokesman Christoph Burger [noted](#) that the Russian decree on the recognition of goods from certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions contradicts the Minsk agreements and contributes to further escalation in eastern Ukraine.

A "DIYA CENTER" WAS OPENED IN DONBAS FOR PROCESSING DOCUMENTS

Stanytsia Luhanska [opened](#) a Diya Center offering Ukrainian citizens access to 260 administrative services. The one-stop-shop center will serve about 25,000 residents of Stanytsia Luhanska and the territories temporarily outside the control of the Ukrainian government. It is the first such center opened in Donbas. The UN Program for Rebuilding and Peace Development allocated more than 500 thousand dollars to its creation, and 1.5 million UAH from the local budget was used. Present at the opening ceremony, the UNDP Resident Representative in Ukraine Dafina Gercheva [stressed](#) that the opening of this center is designed to make administrative and social services more accessible to people affected by the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine, including internally displaced persons. [According to Iryna Vereshchuk](#), minister of Ukraine for the reintegration of the temporarily occupied territories, simplifying bureaucratic procedures for residents of Donbas is a type of "soft power" and contributes to strengthening security.