

HIGHLIGHTS

PULSE OF PEACE IN DONBAS



19–25 November, 2021

3RD INTERNATIONAL CIVILM+ FORUM ON EASTERN UKRAINE WAS HELD

On November 25-26 the Forum on Eastern Ukraine of the international civil society platform CivilMPlus took place. The theme of the Forum was "Overcoming the Conflict in Donbas as an Intergenerational Task: Promoting Justice, Dialogue, and Reconciliation".

The Forum gathered representatives of non-governmental organizations and authorities, diplomats, international experts, activists, and young people and for the first time was held in the format of a teleconference between Kyiv and Berlin. In the two capitals, guests and speakers gathered offline, while those who could not attend in person connected online. The Forum was organized in partnership with the UN in Ukraine.



The opening ceremony of the Forum spoke about the importance of maintaining contacts between people on both sides of the contact line and the need for international support both at the political level and to civil society.

The first panel discussion was on the prospects for political negotiations. The deputy minister of foreign affairs of Ukraine and the deputy minister for reintegration of the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine stressed that Ukraine was fulfilling all its obligations. All speakers agreed that the Normandy and Minsk formats remained the only way to resolve the conflict diplomatically. International partners expressed their full support for Ukraine and confirmed that they would continue their efforts to resume the Normandy format of the negotiations at different levels. The speakers also recognized the importance of civil society involvement: we must always be aware of the people for whom we work; support dialogue and involve civil society in the decision-making process.

Next, representatives of the Women's Initiatives for Peace in the Donbas (WIPD) platform presented a study titled "Amnesty: A Tool to Achieve a Stable Peace? Opinions of People on Both Sides of the Contact Line".



The next two panel discussions were on (1) transitional justice

and key challenges for Ukraine and (2) a shared future in a united Ukraine. The last panel talked about the fears of residents of the occupied territories and what the media, state and civil society can do to bring them together and reintegrate.

The first day of the Forum ended with the opening of the exhibition "(NOT) WAR: Realizing Self and Borders in Dialogs "Donbas Diaries". The exhibition was the result of a dialogue process between young people from Ukraine and Russia.

On the second day of the Forum there were roundtables in Kyiv and Berlin, prepared and held by the member organizations of the CivilM+ platform. Nine round tables were held in Kyiv, two in Berlin. In Kyiv, they talked about youth participation in peacebuilding processes and community development, reintegration issues, the importance of documentation and challenges in the investigation of human rights violations and war crimes, the complexity of crossing the contact line, and other topics. The roundtables in Berlin discussed prospects for conflict resolution within the Normandy format and the impact of Russian propaganda and other informal tools on the perception of war in the EU.

Video recordings of the panel discussions and some of the roundtables are available on the [CivilM+ Facebook page](#).

ESCALATION ON UKRAINE'S BORDERS INTENSIFIES

The United States has sent intelligence to European NATO allies indicating that Russia is preparing for a possible attack on Ukraine, but the Russian authorities have not yet made a final decision on the operation. They understand that any attempt to militarily occupy a large part of Ukraine would meet resistance and lead to new Western sanctions, which could harm the economy, [Bloomberg said](#), citing sources familiar with the negotiations.

The international Conflict Intelligence Team also [published](#) an investigation on the accumulation of Russian troops and equipment near the borders with Ukraine.

[According to Ukrainian Defense Minister Aleksey Reznikov](#), Russia is unlikely to dare to launch a major offensive, but Ukraine is ready to repel Russian aggression.

Budanov [said](#) that Russia is planning an attack before the end of January or beginning of February.

Russian presidential press secretary Dmitry Peskov [denied](#) any such plans, calling the intelligence about a possible invasion of Ukraine part of a targeted information campaign carried out to cover up "aggressive intentions that may take place in Kyiv".

At the same time, a statement was [published](#) by the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service claiming that Ukraine was allegedly building up its military presence in Donbas.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba [stressed](#) that Ukraine was not planning an offensive military operation in Donbas and was working on resuming the Normandy format. He noted that the intensity of disinformation by Russia has increased significantly, including the use of false accusations of Ukraine preparing for a military attack in Donbas, and called on Russia to engage constructively in diplomatic efforts for a peaceful resolution.

Melinda Haring, deputy director of the Atlantic Council Eurasia Center, [analyzes](#) the significant difference between the spring 2021 troop buildup and the current concentration of forces. In her view, this may be evidence of Russia's preparation for hybrid warfare. As countermeasures, she cites tough new joint EU-US sanctions, support for Ukrainian forces by the US Special Operations Command in case of an invasion, and US diplomatic leverage to resolve the crisis in Belarus as soon as possible, which would allow the EU to focus on the situation in Ukraine.

GERMANY'S NEW GOVERNMENT COALITION PLEDGES SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE

The parties participating in the German government have completed negotiations on a coalition agreement. Its [text](#) was published by Spiegel. The new ruling coalition in Germany demanded that the Russian Federation stop the war in Donbas and return Crimea to Ukraine. It stressed that the path to a peaceful resolution of the conflict in eastern Ukraine and the lifting of the corresponding sanctions depends on the full implementation of the Minsk agreements.

It also notes the readiness of the ruling coalition to support Ukraine's movement toward membership in the European Union and to continue to help Ukraine to restore its full territorial integrity and sovereignty. [Deutsche Welle](#) and [Evropeyskaya Pravda](#) offer an analysis of the coalition agreement.

On November 26, during a press marathon in Kyiv, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenski [said](#) that he expects the new German government to continue its sanctions policy against Russia, as well as cooperation in the energy sector.

WESTERN SANCTIONS: A COMPREHENSIVE RESPONSE IS NEEDED

With escalation on the border, Ukraine [advocates](#) a comprehensive package to deter Russia from a new stage of aggression, including political and economic containment of Russia, as well as military assistance to Ukraine. At the same time, sanctions should deter Russia from both aggression against Ukraine and the destruction of the European security architecture. [According to a CNN report quoting sources familiar with the discussions](#), US President Joe Biden's administration is considering sending military advisers and new equipment, including weapons, to Ukraine. At the same time, U.S. officials are negotiating with European allies to create a new package of sanctions that would take effect if Russia invades Ukraine.

The head of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Bob Menendez, has [introduced an amendment](#) to the defense budget that would trigger a [cascade of sanctions](#) against high-level Russian officials, the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, major financial institutions, and national debt transactions in the event of an invasion of Ukraine. Meanwhile, the Republican Party insists on voting for its own amendment to sanctions on the pipeline project now - before any potential Russian invasion.

[According to German Chancellor Angela Merkel](#), the EU should pursue a unified policy regarding Russia's deployment of troops near the border with Ukraine and should be ready to impose additional sanctions against Russia if the situation in and around eastern Ukraine escalates.

UKRAINIAN DELEGATION SEEKS RED CROSS ACCESS TO PLACES OF DETENTION ON TEMPORARILY OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

The Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) and its working subgroups met on November 24. [In a press release following the meeting](#), Ambassador Mikko Kinnunen, Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine and in the TCG, noted that the security situation along the contact line was extremely volatile, with the average number of ceasefire violations per day exceeding the level observed before the entry into force of the ceasefire in July 2020. This makes life difficult for civilians, and the growing number of obstacles to freedom of movement makes the SMM's work difficult.

The Economic Working Group had a constructive discussion on various aspects of water supply in certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine (ORDLO).

Environmental topics, pension payments, and issues related to mobile communications were also discussed. The Ukrainian side once again confirmed that the validity of the cards for the payment of pensions to residents of the ORDLO was extended until 1 April next year.

In the humanitarian subgroup, the Ukrainian delegation [raised](#) the issue of investigating the circumstances of the death of Ruslan Makarts, a Ukrainian citizen held in the Makeyevka detention facility (part of the Donetsk Region temporarily not under the control of the Ukrainian government) and urged the Russian side to support the initiative to appeal to the International Committee of the Red Cross to conduct an objective investigation of all the circumstances of the death of the Ukrainian citizen, whose release has been long sought by the Ukrainian side. It is noted that the lack of access of representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross to the places of detention in the temporarily uncontrolled parts of Donbas is a violation of the agreements reached at the Normandy format summit on December 9, 2019, while Ukraine fully complies with the relevant obligations.

CHARITY ACTION FOR CHILDREN LIVING ALONG THE CONTACT LINE IN DONBAS

The "St. Nicholas Deer" charitable campaign has [begun](#) in Ukraine. Its main goal is to collect gifts and organize New Year's events for children living near the contact line. Everyone can take part in the campaign, which is held annually for the sixth time. Currently, the [database](#) contains wishes and letters from children living in three dozen settlements in the Luhansk and Donetsk regions. The story of the action is [told](#) by the publication "Rubrika".