

HIGHLIGHTS

PULSE OF PEACE IN DONBAS



26 November–2 December, 2021

FOREIGN MINISTERS DISCUSSED THE SITUATION IN DONBAS AT THE OSCE MEETING

On December 2, the two-day meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council began in Stockholm. In his [opening speech](#), U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken noted that Russia was responsible for the failure to comply with the Minsk agreements and called on it to respect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, namely, to de-escalate the situation, cease troop build-up and return troops to their previous positions, and adhere to the Minsk agreements, including the cease-fire and unimpeded work of the OSCE SMM.

In addition to participation in the meeting, the ministers held a number of bilateral meetings.

Thus, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba [held talks](#) with U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken to discuss the introduction of a comprehensive package of measures to deter Russia from further aggressive actions against Ukraine. In particular, they talked about tough economic sanctions. The diplomats reiterated the importance of a strong strategic partnership between Ukraine and the United States. Commenting during the briefing on the results of the talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Anthony Blinken stressed that Ukraine posed no threat to Russia and did not seek a confrontation that would justify Russian military intervention, with the only threat being a resumption of Russian aggression against Ukraine. He also added that Russia would face serious sanctions if the conflict with

Ukraine escalated. He pointed to the best way to avoid the crisis as diplomacy, in particular the withdrawal of Russian forces from the Ukrainian border.

TURKISH PRESIDENT SAYS HE IS READY TO MEDIATE BETWEEN UKRAINE AND RUSSIA

On 29 November, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan [said](#) that he was ready to mediate between the Ukrainian and Russian authorities in order to ensure peace in Donbas. According to him, contacts have already been established with both the Ukrainian side and Russian President Vladimir Putin for this purpose. [Commenting on the Turkish leader's initiative](#), advisor to the head of the Ukrainian presidential office Mykhaylo Podolyak welcomed such a proposal. In his opinion, this can help in resolving the issues of human rights protection in the territories temporarily outside the control of the Ukrainian government and in the release of detainees.

At the same time, Russian presidential spokesman Dmitry Peskov [refused to comment](#) on the information that Ukraine handed over to Russia through Turkish President Recep Erdoğan a list for the exchange of detainees. [According to Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova](#), Turkey cannot play a mediating role, but it should contribute to convincing the Ukrainian authorities to conduct a direct dialogue with representatives of the so-called "L/DPR".

VLADIMIR ZELENSKY'S PRESS CONFERENCE: UKRAINE IS READY FOR ESCALATION, NO DRAFT LAW ON THE TRANSITION PERIOD IS BEING CONSIDERED

On November 26, a press-marathon of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky [was held](#), dedicated to the middle of his presidential term. The press conference lasted about six hours and included questions from 32 representatives of Ukrainian and international media, selected in advance by the Office of the President. The lack of a procedure for free accreditation of the media and Mr. Zelenski's attitude towards journalists became a reason for criticism from the [media community](#) and [non-governmental organizations](#).

A number of questions concerned the situation in Donbas, relations with Russia and escalation at the borders.

According to the Ukrainian president, he has certain hopes for a number of diplomatic formats, including the Normandy format and talks between the United States and Russia, but admits that progress in the Minsk and Normandy formats has stalled. Vladimir Zelensky said that he had discussed potential formats for talks with Russia with European Council President Charles Michel, who called for "frank" communication with Moscow, but the Russian side finds reasons to avoid a direct meeting. Ukraine expects the new German government to continue its sanctions policy against Russia, as well as cooperation in the energy sector. Vladimir Zelensky also commented on media reports about the escalation of the situation and the

likelihood of a full-scale war with Russia, stressing that he receives daily information from Defense Ministry intelligence and intelligence of partner countries, and adding that Ukraine has full control over its borders and is ready for an escalation. According to him, despite support from partner countries and technical and financial assistance provided by them, Ukraine should count first and foremost on itself, including being ready to defend itself. The President of Ukraine paid special attention to the situation with the special operation to detain Russian mercenaries of the "Wagner" private military unit, saying that he did not support it because it could threaten relations with Turkey, which is actively involved in the normalization of the situation in Donbas. He [noted](#) that the lists of persons illegally detained by Russia were handed over to Russia with the mediation of Turkey.

In addition, Vladimir Zelensky said that the draft law on the transition period will not be considered in the near future, because according to European leaders, including the president of Russia, its adoption means that Ukraine unilaterally withdraws from the Minsk process, and this could cause an escalation of the conflict in Donbas.

The UNIAN news agency [broadcasted](#) the press conference in a text form. [Radio Svoboda](#) and [Ukrainska Pravda](#) offer summaries of the main points made during the press conference.

THE SPECIAL ORDER OF SELF-GOVERNMENT IN TEMPORARILY OCCUPIED TERRITORIES OF UKRAINE HAS BEEN EXTENDED FOR A YEAR

The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine [voted](#) for the bill #6342, which [extends](#) the law "On the special order of local self-government in certain areas of the Donetsk and Lugansk regions" for another year - until December 31, 2022. As noted in the explanatory note, the purpose of the adopted draft law is to create additional temporary opportunities for the implementation of legislative conditions aimed at a peaceful settlement of the situation in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions on the basis of the principles and norms of international law and the UN Charter.

Andrey Kostin, Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Legal Policy, [noted](#) that this law is the basis of the negotiation process to achieve peace in Donbas and its extension is necessary to continue the negotiation process in the Normandy format and in the Trilateral Contact Group.

A CAMPAIGN IN SUPPORT OF UKRAINIAN JOURNALISTS HELD BY RUSSIA WAS LAUNCHED

The Ukrainian PEN Center and the ZMINA Center for Human Rights [launched](#) the #SolidarityWords campaign. Within its framework, 13 famous writers and journalists will become ambassadors acting in defense of 13 journalists illegally detained on politically motivated fabricated cases in the Russian Federation and temporarily occupied Crimea. The solidarity program is designed to draw attention to the

situation of Ukrainian political prisoners and to promote international pressure on Russia for their release. As reminded by the organizers of the campaign, 127 citizens of Ukraine are currently imprisoned or under house arrest in Russia and temporarily occupied Crimea on political grounds, and at least 300 more are in temporarily occupied territories of Luhansk and Donetsk regions.

According to the campaign's supporters, it could accelerate the recent stalled prisoner exchange between Ukraine and Russia. As Ukrainian filmmaker and former political prisoner Oleg Sentsov [notes](#), the frequent mention of a political prisoner's name increases his chances of being released before his sentence.