

HIGHLIGHTS

PULSE OF PEACE IN DONBAS



3–9 December, 2021

NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE U.S. AND RUSSIAN PRESIDENTS: RUSSIA DEMANDS GUARANTEES OF NATO NON-EXTENSION

On 7 December, Russian and US presidents Vladimir Putin and Joe Biden held talks. The US president [expressed](#) concern over the Russian troop build-up near Ukraine's borders, called for de-escalation and warned Vladimir Putin about the readiness to implement "decisive economic and other measures" in case of a military escalation of the Russian-Ukrainian crisis. For his part, the Russian president declared Ukraine's responsibility for the escalation of the situation in the region, also noting that Russia is interested in obtaining legally recorded guarantees precluding NATO's expansion to the east. [According to Carnegie.ru editor-in-chief Oleksandr Baunov](#), the talks were meant to signal that Russia was not interested in participating in the Normandy format and believed that the issue of Ukraine should be discussed directly with the USA. At the same time, he calls the guarantees of NATO's non-expansion to the east a strategic horizon of requests from Russia, and the current attempt at negotiations the last attempt by Vladimir Putin to act within the existing legal framework before 2024.

In a [statement](#) published on the website of the Russian Foreign Ministry, Russia demands legal guarantees that NATO will not move eastward and that Ukraine will refuse to join the Alliance. The Russian Foreign Ministry added that Russia would shortly present draft international legal documents to start negotiations in appropriate formats.

The White House continues to adhere to the position that Ukraine's accession to NATO is a matter exclusively for Ukraine and NATO. At a briefing, [White House press secretary Jen Psaki said](#) that the USA definitely supports Ukraine's aspiration to join the alliance, but a number of conditions must be met for this to happen. At the same time, following its conversation with Vladimir Putin, the USA [started preparations](#) for talks between NATO countries and Russia to discuss Russia's concerns about NATO's expansion eastward and measures to reduce tensions in the region.

TALKS BETWEEN THE PRESIDENTS OF UKRAINE AND THE U.S.: RUSSIA WAS WARNED ABOUT THE USE OF DRASTIC MEASURES IN CASE OF ESCALATION IN DONBAS

On 9 December, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and US President Joe Biden [had talks](#). The key issue of the discussion was the security situation in Ukraine and the course and results of the talks between the US and Russian leaders.

Volodymyr Zelensky thanked Joseph Biden for his strong support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and reiterated his commitment to boosting a peaceful settlement, noting that Ukraine was ready to discuss different formats of diplomatic influence on the situation. The heads of state also discussed in detail ways to support Ukraine in counteracting the ongoing hybrid aggression.

The U.S. president [reiterated](#) his readiness to impose wide-ranging sanctions on Russia in case of further military intervention, stressing that the U.S., its allies and partners are committed to the principle of "no solutions or negotiations on Ukraine without Ukraine.

Later, Vladimir Zelensky [clarified](#) that U.S. President Joe Biden did not offer to negotiate with the so-called "L/DPR". U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin [said](#) that the United States is prepared to provide Ukraine with everything it needs to defend the territory, adding that the United States will seek different forms of support because "there is space for diplomacy" in the current situation.

Earlier it was [reported](#) that the United States and the EU are negotiating an aggressive package of economic sanctions against Russia, but the countries have not decided when and under what conditions to introduce it. The U.S. authorities intend to coordinate their actions with European partners that have closer economic ties with Russia, interlocutors told CNN.

Possible sanctions include disconnecting Russia from the SWIFT interbank transfer system and, [according to Bloomberg](#), restrictions on converting the ruble into other currencies. They would mean Russia's complete isolation from the global financial system, U.S. Undersecretary of State Victoria Nuland [said](#) at a hearing of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the U.S. Congress. She also noted that the U.S. expects Germany to stop the Nord Stream-2 gas pipeline project if Russia militarily invades Ukraine.

At the same time, Russian presidential spokesman Dmitry Peskov [called](#) the CNN article "the continuation of information hysteria" in connection with the talks between the presidents of the United States and Russia.

[Radio Liberty](#) and the [Atlantic Council](#) offer a summary of the results of the talks and expert commentary.

THE UKRAINIAN SIDE IN THE TCG PROPOSES TO EXPAND THE COMPOSITION OF JOINT CENTER OF CONTROL AND COORDINATION AND CONDUCT AN EXCHANGE OF DETAINEES

On December 7, meetings of the working subgroups of the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) [took place](#), during which the Ukrainian delegation voiced three key initiatives - the return to a sustainable ceasefire by ensuring the implementation of measures to strengthen the ceasefire of July 22, 2020, the unblocking of the entry-exit checkpoints in Schastye and Zolote, working from the Ukrainian side since November 2020, as well as the mutual exchange of detainees.

[According to the speaker of the Ukrainian delegation to the TCG](#), Oleksiy Arestovych, the Ukrainian side is ready for the exchange of 60 persons in respect of whom the necessary procedures have been passed, even before the new year. He explained that the Russian side put forward conditions of procedural clearance, which is not always possible under the Ukrainian legislation. With regard to some people for the exchange it is necessary for the Ukrainian judicial system to receive information about their whereabouts for the possibility of conviction or pardon.

However, none of these initiatives was supported by the Russian side.

Ambassador Mikko Kinnunen, Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine and in the TCG, [noted](#) that the security situation had been the focus of the meetings, emphasizing that the sides had a common understanding that a long-term ceasefire was a priority. He also stated that the political subgroup managed to constructively discuss the unified Action Plan for the implementation of the Minsk agreements.

On December 9, an extraordinary meeting of the TCG took place. The Ukrainian delegation proposed expanding the composition of the Joint Centre for Control and Coordination (JCCC) to include authorized representatives of the Normandy format member states as an independent party in order to ensure a sustainable ceasefire, effective monitoring and verification of the ceasefire. According to the Ukrainian delegation in the TCG, there was also considered a proposal to make counter statements on the return to the ceasefire on December 10, 2021. However, these steps were not supported by Russia either.

[According to Russian representative to the TCG](#), Boris Gryzlov, expansion of the JCCC is not possible. A [press release](#) issued by Mikko Kinnunen, Special Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, also noted that the participants in the extraordinary meeting failed to reach a common understanding on options to improve the security situation along the contact line, stressing that political will is the most important element for effectively achieving a ceasefire.

COVID-19 SITUATION: DONBAS IN THE "YELLOW" ZONE, VACCINATION CONTINUES

[As of December 10](#), there have been 5,845 cases of COVID-19, including 2,078 deaths, in the government-controlled part of Luhansk oblast since the pandemic began. For the Donetsk region, the number of cases is 160588 and 4,833 deaths.

As of December 7, the "red" level of epidemic danger [was canceled](#) in nine regions of Ukraine, including Luhansk and Donetsk regions. They moved to the "yellow" zone. It is noted that the number of hospitalized with confirmed cases of COVID-19 over the past 7 days in these regions decreased by 40% and 43.5%, respectively.

At the same time, since December 6, new quarantine rules [came into force](#), providing for stricter restrictions in the "yellow" zones. So, visiting mass events, as well as the work of cinemas, theaters, catering establishments and gyms will be allowed only if all personnel and visitors have at least one dose of vaccination, a negative test or a certificate of recovery from Covid-19.

[According to the Donetsk Regional State Administration](#), the number of vaccinations given to residents exceeded 1 million, including about 560000 people who received at least a partial course of vaccinations. In Luhansk oblast about 472,000 people [were vaccinated](#), and more than 252,000 people were at least partially vaccinated. On the territory of the so-called "LPR" since the beginning of the pandemic about 21,000 people have been vaccinated and almost 3,000 people have died from COVID-19. For the so-called "DPR," this [number](#) is over 113,000 people and about 8,700 deaths, respectively. There is no official information on the state of COVID-19 on the territory of the so-called "L/DPR".

INTERVIEW OF IRINA VERESHCHUK ON THE RESULTS OF THE FIRST MONTH AS MINISTER FOR REINTEGRATION

Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine, Minister of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories Iryna Vereshchuk considers the provision of housing for internally displaced persons to be her main task as Minister. According to her, almost eight years after the beginning of the conflict in the Donbas only 12% of internally displaced persons have their own housing, and with the current dynamics it may take about 50 years to solve this problem. For the next year about 20 million hryvnias are [reserved](#) for the centralized purchase of housing in Ukraine, they will be directed to support the displaced persons who are state employees. About this and how Ukraine can contribute to the return of Donbas and help residents of the temporarily uncontrolled territories – in an [interview](#) for Donbas Realii.