

HIGHLIGHTS

PULSE OF PEACE IN DONBAS



10–16 December, 2021

RUSSIA PROPOSES DRAFT AGREEMENTS ON "SECURITY GUARANTEES" WITH NATO: REACTIONS

On December 10, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg [commented](#) on the Russian demands to cancel the possibility for Ukraine to join the Alliance, stressing that no one except Ukraine and NATO member states could decide on accession, despite Russia's position.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg [met](#) in Brussels on 16 December and discussed Russia's military build-up in and around Ukraine. Jens Stoltenberg noted that there were no signs of stopping or slowing down this build-up, it was provocative and undermined security in Europe, he called on Russia to de-escalate and respect Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity. Stoltenberg also assured that Ukraine had the right to choose its own security mechanisms and that NATO's continued policy of providing Ukraine with practical support posed no threat to Russia. Stoltenberg reiterated an earlier proposal to hold a meeting of the NATO-Russia Council.

On 17 December, the Russian Foreign Ministry published draft treaties on so-called "security guarantees," which Russia [demands](#) from NATO and [offers](#) to the US. In one of the points of the treaty with NATO, Russia suggests that the member states take obligations preventing further expansion of the Alliance, including accession of Ukraine, and also notes that "the participants confirm that they do not regard each other as adversaries". The draft agreement with the U.S. says that the U.S. "undertakes to exclude further expansion of NATO in the eastern direction, to refuse

to admit to the alliance states that previously belonged to the USSR". [According to NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg](#), NATO is considering the possibility of a dialogue with Russia on this issue, but any dialogue must take into account the concerns of the Alliance and take place in consultation with European partners, including Ukraine. White House press secretary Jen Psaki [stressed](#) that there would be no negotiations without European allies and partners. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov [said](#) that Moscow was extremely disappointed by the signals coming from Washington and NATO after receiving Russian proposals on so-called "security guarantees", in particular, by the fact that they were all public.

Ukrainian Foreign Ministry spokesman Oleh Mykolenko [made a comment](#) and stressed that only Ukraine and NATO members have the right to determine the vector of their relations, and the best guarantee of security on the continent would be to curtail the escalation and stop the international armed conflict initiated by Russia. As constructive steps that Russia should take to achieve this goal, he cited the implementation of the Minsk agreements and the agreements of the leaders of the Normandy format, first of all the observance of the ceasefire, the continuation of the demining process, the opening of new checkpoints on the contact line and the stages of the two-party release of detainees.

U.S. NOT PLANNING TO SEND TROOPS TO UKRAINE, DISCUSSION OF MEASURES TO INFLUENCE RUSSIA CONTINUES

Ukraine has received guarantees from the United States that the state will not be put under pressure to implement the Minsk agreements or because of the "special status" of Donbas – this was [stated](#) by advisor to the head of the Office of the President Alexey Arestovich in an interview with Radio Svoboda. He also noted that there would be no pressure from the United States to impose the so-called "special status" of Donbas in Russia's wording. This was his reaction to the Associated Press [report](#) that the U.S. could put pressure on Ukraine to grant partial autonomy to non-controlled territories in Donbas. In particular, the possibility to control the education and healthcare systems.

Earlier, U.S. President Joe Biden [noted](#) that there was no question of sending U.S. troops to Ukraine; however, in the event of an invasion, devastating economic sanctions would be imposed on Russia.

[According to Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba](#), among the priorities of U.S. assistance in countering Russian aggression are the provision of modern weapons to Ukraine, in-depth intelligence sharing, and the imposition of economic sanctions against the aggressor state. At the same time, Joe Biden's earlier idea to discuss with the Russian Federation its claims to NATO expansion, in particular, Ukraine's accession to it, with the participation of only key member states of the Alliance, caused harsh criticism from other countries, including Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland and Romania.

This was [reported](#) by Bloomberg, citing sources in diplomatic circles. Allies fear that such talks would play into Russia's hands, creating mistrust between the U.S. and

European allies, as well as within Europe. For example, Marko Michelson, chairman of the Estonian parliament's foreign affairs committee, called for blocking such a meeting through diplomatic efforts, stressing that any talks with Vladimir Putin should relate exclusively to how to ensure Ukraine's territorial integrity and eliminate Russia's military threat. In his view, granting Russia a "veto right" over the architecture of the European security system would only lead to increased aggression.

A NUMBER OF INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTS IN SUPPORT OF UKRAINE HAVE BEEN ADOPTED

At a meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna on December 9, the EU statement on Russia's aggression against Ukraine and illegal occupation of Crimea was [read](#), stating that the negotiation process in the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) and in the Normandy format was deadlocked due to Russia's refusal to recognize itself as a party to the conflict in eastern Ukraine. The EU recalled that it had been two years since the last Normandy summit, and most of the agreed measures had still not been implemented. Although agreements at the technical level have been reached in the TCG working groups, they remain blocked at the political level. The document also states concerns about the deteriorating security situation in eastern Ukraine and Russia's military build-up near the border, and stresses that any threatening or destabilizing behavior is unacceptable.

Ukraine's permanent representative to international organizations in Vienna, Yevhen Tsymbaliuk, noted at the meeting that Ukraine proposed a number of concrete steps, including a new "Christmas" truce, in order to break the "impasse" in the TCG negotiations. However, he fears that these measures may again be blocked by the political agenda or the demand for so-called "direct dialogue."

On December 15, the sixth summit of the Eastern Partnership was held in Brussels. The [declaration](#) adopted at its end stressed the EU's commitment to support the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all eastern partners within internationally recognized borders, and confirmed the inalienable right of each partner country to choose its own level of ambition in its interaction with the EU. Also members of the "Associated Trio" - Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine - issued a common statement on the margins of the summit, [stating](#) that they would work to further deepen integration into the European Union. Europeyskaya Pravda [offers](#) an analysis of the statement.

On December 16, the European Parliament [adopted](#) a resolution concerning the security situation on the Ukrainian border and in the temporarily occupied territories, which called on Russia to withdraw its troops and stop threats, and confirmed the unacceptability of concessions on Ukraine's choice of its alliances. The resolution proposes the introduction of a global mechanism of anti-corruption sanctions, which would tighten control over Russian assets and investments of dubious origin and consistently implement EU anti-money laundering legislation.

[According to Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba](#), it is also important that it clearly confirms the prospect of Ukraine's accession to the EU.

THE VERKHOVNA RADA OF UKRAINE IN THE FIRST READING ADOPTED A LAW TO SUPPORT PRISONERS OF WAR

The draft law "On social and legal protection of persons in respect of whom the fact of deprivation of personal freedom as a result of armed aggression against Ukraine and members of their families has been established" [suggests](#) defining the procedure for making decisions on the determination of the fact of deprivation of personal freedom as a result of armed aggression against Ukraine. In particular, according to the draft law, a special commission will be created under the Ministry of Reintegration of the temporarily occupied territories, which will take decisions on establishing the fact of deprivation of freedom, maintain a single register of such persons, pay annual and one-time financial assistance to prisoners and their family members. At the legislative level, the provision of assistance, including psychological assistance, to captives after their release will be enshrined in law, and reimbursement of their expenses for legal assistance will be guaranteed. The Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union together with the ZMINA Human Rights Center [offers](#) an analysis of the draft law.

MORE THAN HALF OF UKRAINIANS BELIEVE THAT THE MINSK AGREEMENTS SHOULD BE REWRITTEN – "RATING"

[The results of the poll](#), conducted by the Ukrainian sociological group "Rating" on December 6-8, 2021, showed that two-thirds of the respondents are superficially familiar with the content of the Minsk agreements, a quarter does not know about them at all. However, the majority (54%) believe that the Minsk agreements should be reviewed and new ones should be signed. 21% believe that Ukraine should withdraw from the negotiation process and make decisions without the participation of international mediators. Only 12% believe that Ukraine should fully implement the Minsk agreements.

Among the options for the format of negotiations to resolve the conflict in Donbas the relative majority (45%) support the idea of expanding the "Normandy" format with the involvement of the United States and the United Kingdom, 12% are in favor of negotiations with representatives of the so-called "L/DPR".

Almost three fourths (72%) of Ukrainians consider Russia a hostile state, 12% of respondents tend to perceive it as a union state.

Also 56% of citizens are in favor of direct negotiations with Russia on the settlement of the conflict in Donbas as a non-alternative solution, 41% are against it. At the same time, the number of those who support the involvement of Turkey in the negotiations on the settlement of the conflict in Donbas and those who are against this possibility is equal (46%). The idea of introducing visas with the Russian Federation was supported by 52% of respondents, the number of supporters has increased by 13% for the last 2 years.

Also in the course of the public [opinion poll](#) conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology on December 3-11 the respondents were asked a question

about their actions in case of an armed attack of Russia on Ukraine. Half of the respondents noted that they were ready to resist the aggressor in one way or another, with 33% - with weapons in hand, and about 22% - by participating in civil resistance actions. In the regional dimension, the readiness to resist varies from 60.5% in the west of the country to 37.2% in the eastern regions.

The [results of a survey](#) on the escalation of the conflict in Donbas, conducted by the Russian analytical Levada Center, were also published. More than 75% of Russians do not rule out that tensions near Ukraine's eastern borders could escalate to war, with half of the respondents considering the United States and NATO countries to be the initiators of the escalation of the situation in eastern Ukraine, 16% saying Ukraine was responsible for the escalation, and only 4% saying Russia was responsible. At the same time, according to a [survey](#) about the attitude of Russian citizens to Ukraine, conducted by the Russian Center for Public Opinion Research, the majority of Russians (70%) consider Ukraine a "brotherly", friendly, neighborly country or a strategic partner.