

HIGHLIGHTS

PULSE OF PEACE IN DONBAS



6–13 January, 2021

WEEK OF NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN RUSSIA AND WESTERN COUNTRIES: RESULTS

On January 10, the United States and Russia held closed-door talks in Geneva; the key topic of the discussion was Russia's demands for security guarantees from the United States and NATO, in particular, guarantees that NATO would not expand and that it would refuse to deploy strike systems in Europe. The Alliance described the Russian proposals as unacceptable. First Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, who represented the U.S., [stressed](#) that the consequences of a potential invasion of Ukraine would be much harsher than in 2014. Meanwhile, de-escalation on Russia's part could represent both the return of Russian troops to barracks and notifying the U.S. of what exercises are being conducted in Russia and what their purpose is. She added that the U.S. does not know if Russia is ready for this kind of de-escalation, and confirmed that the U.S. is willing to discuss placing missiles in Europe, but does not agree to restrictions on accepting new countries into NATO, and security negotiations cannot be completed in the short term.

For his part, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov, who heads the Russian delegation, [said](#) that obtaining legal guarantees of NATO non-expansion is "an absolute imperative" for Russia and assured that it has no plans to attack Ukraine.

On January 12, talks were held as part of the first NATO-Russia Council meeting since 2019. Secretary General of the North Atlantic Alliance Jens Stoltenberg [noted](#) that they were difficult, which is the reason for the need for this kind of dialogue. He

also said that NATO and Russia have serious disagreements that will not be easily resolved. In particular, the Alliance states refused Russia's demands regarding the non-expansion of NATO and the presence of the bloc's troops on its eastern flank. However, the Alliance is ready to continue dialogue with Russia on a number of controversial issues. Commenting on the results of the meeting, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko [said](#) that Russia was not ready for compromises regarding its demands on ending NATO's open door policy and providing legal guarantees that the Alliance would not expand further eastward.

On January 13, the OSCE Permanent Council held a meeting in Vienna to discuss Russia's demands for security guarantees from the U.S. and NATO. In his statement, Alexander Lukashevich, Russia's permanent representative to the OSCE, [said](#) that in case of no response within a certain time frame, Russia would take measures to eliminate perceived threats, which would lead to a deterioration of the security situation of all states. In his briefing following the meeting, he [noted](#) that so far Russia has not received an adequate response.

After the talks, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov [said](#) that the United States and its NATO allies were not ready to meet Russia's key demands on security guarantees, in particular, the withdrawal of the Alliance infrastructure and returning it to the borders of 1997. In his opinion, there are no grounds for a new round of negotiations with the United States and NATO in the near future.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov [said](#) that Russia will determine its next steps after receiving a written response from the United States and NATO to the security proposals.

In his [commentary](#) on the results of the OSCE Permanent Council meeting, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba assessed the week of active diplomatic negotiations between Western countries and Russia as unsatisfactory for Moscow. The minister stressed that the OSCE Permanent Council meeting showed consolidated international support for Ukraine.

[Radio Liberty](#), [Europeyskaya Pravda](#) and [Novaya Gazeta](#) offer a brief analysis of the outcome of the talks.

DISCUSSIONS ON THE POSSIBILITY OF A MEETING IN THE NORMANDY FORMAT

On January 6, the deputy head of the Russian presidential administration, Dmitriy Kozak, [held talks](#) in Moscow with his colleagues in the Normandy format - the foreign policy adviser to German Chancellor Jens Pletner and the diplomatic adviser to French President Emmanuel Bonne. Dmitriy Kozak said that the sides agreed on further contacts, including those involving Ukraine, to end the conflict in the east of the country as soon as possible. He also noted that the creation of new negotiating formats to resolve the conflict in the east of Ukraine is inappropriate, because different formats of agreements in the parallel negotiations may be interpreted differently by the parties. Before the visit to Moscow, Pletner and Bonn [held](#)

telephone consultations with the head of the Ukrainian presidential office, Andriy Yermak.

On January 7, during a joint press conference of the head of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen and French President Emmanuel Macron, a [statement](#) was made about the proposal of French President Macron and German Chancellor Scholz to hold a meeting of the Normandy Four leaders to resolve the conflict in Donbas. According to Emmanuel Macron, the meeting, the proposal of which has already been passed to Russian President Vladimir Putin, could take place in the coming weeks. The press secretary of the Russian president, Dmitry Peskov, [noted](#) that it is impossible to name specific dates for a meeting in the Normandy format.

On January 11, Jens Pletner and Emmanuel Bonn arrived in Ukraine; the [main topic of the talks](#) was the activation of the Normandy format. The head of the Ukrainian presidential office, Andriy Yermak, confirmed the commitment of the Ukrainian side to the political and diplomatic path, noting that the next summit could give the necessary impetus to the peace settlement process.

[Experts](#) have different opinions on the possibility of organizing a meeting in the Normandy format. For example, they say that one of the conditions necessary for Russia's participation in them is the conviction of its leadership to receive concessions from Ukraine, otherwise the conflict will continue to escalate.

NEW U.S. SANCTIONS IMPLY RESTRICTIONS AGAINST THE PRESIDENT OF RUSSIA

The US Senate has [published](#) a bill on sanctions proposed to be imposed on Russia if Russian troops invade Ukraine, as well as in case of further escalation of the conflict. The document on the new package of restrictions aimed at Russia's economy, its leader and top officials of the country was introduced by 26 senators led by Robert Menendez, head of the Foreign Affairs Committee. The proposed measures -- a ban on entering the United States and freezing U.S. assets of the Russian president and government officials, sanctions against at least three major Russian banks, Russian foreign debt, and the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline – [received the support](#) of U.S. President Joe Biden's administration.

[According to Associated Press sources](#), Russia may also be added to the list of countries subject to the harshest sanctions, in which case the export of electronics, software and technology would be banned. The New York Times [notes](#) that the White House is also considering arming the Ukrainian resistance forces in the event of an invasion by Russia.

At a briefing on January 11, Deputy Chief of State Victoria Nuland [emphasized](#) that the U.S. and the European Union share a common understanding regarding the introduction of new economic sanctions, and are consulting with European partners amid the concentration of Russian troops in the border regions.

The introduction of new U.S. sanctions against Russia will force Moscow to resort to an "adequate response," [said](#) Russian presidential press secretary Dmitry Peskov.

He called the announcement of the restrictions an attempt to put pressure during international negotiations on Ukraine and the war in Donbas. According to him, the bill introduced in the US Senate, Russia can equate to an initiative to break relations.

RESEARCHERS CLAIM CONTINUED MOVEMENT OF RUSSIAN TROOPS TO THE BORDERS OF UKRAINE

Russia has deployed at least eight large groups on its border with Ukraine, which have surrounded the country on three sides and could invade as early as January, [the New York Times reported](#), based on data from officials, analysts and satellite imagery. Journalists also [note](#) the deployment of military helicopters to the borders, which could be a signal that preparations for a potential attack are continuing. [The Conflict Intelligence Team](#) is monitoring the situation, and the Donbas. Realii media outlet has created an [interactive map](#) of Russia's presence near the Ukrainian borders and in the temporarily uncontrolled parts of Ukraine. [The Russian Defence Ministry](#) has said that the purpose of the transfer of military equipment to the border regions is to conduct military exercises. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg also [noted](#) the increase in the concentration of Russian troops in Ukraine and near its borders. In this connection, the head of the organization stressed the need to continue dialogue with Russia, while the Alliance is ready to take force if diplomatic methods do not work.