

HIGHLIGHTS

PULSE OF PEACE IN DONBAS



21–27 January, 2022

US AND NATO SENT RUSSIA A RESPONSE TO DEMANDS FOR "SECURITY GUARANTEES"

On January 26, the US provided Russia with a written response to the so-called "Security guarantees".

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken [said](#) that the US would not publish the text of the responses and [expected](#) the same from Moscow, as diplomacy has a better chance of success if negotiations remain confidential, while noting that they outlined the views of the United States and allies, assessed Russia's "concerns" and indicated areas in which the United States and Russia could find common ground.

Kyiv also read Washington's response. [According to Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba](#), Ukraine has no objections to the content of the American response. He stressed the importance of continuing the diplomatic track of contacts with Russia and noted that Ukraine's position was taken into account in the US response. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov [said](#) that the document did not contain a "positive response" on the main issue for Russia – the position on further non-extension of NATO to the East and non-deployment of striking weapons.

Russia's written response to the demands for "security guarantees" was also [provided](#) by NATO, which refused to give a commitment not to admit Ukraine to the alliance. A supposed summary of the responses was [published by The New York Times](#): According to its sources, the US and NATO offered Russia an agreement on limiting nuclear weapons and the scale of military exercises, while making it clear that Russia has no right to veto the presence of nuclear weapons, troops or

conventional weapons in NATO countries. Expert commentary on this situation is offered by Radio Svoboda.

RUSSIAN INITIATIVES TO RECOGNIZE THE "L/DPR" AND PROVIDE ARMS TO THEM: DEVELOPMENTS

On 26 January, the United Russia party [asked](#) the Russian leadership to provide the so-called "DPR" and "LPR" with arms. According to the head of the United Russia faction, Vladimir Vasilyev, the reason for this was concern for the "well-being of civilians". Earlier that day, First Vice Speaker of the Russian Federation Council Andrei Turchak [said](#) that Russia should provide assistance to the "DPR" and "LPR" groups in the form of deliveries of certain types of weapons to improve their defense capabilities. At the same time, Russian presidential spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that Vladimir Putin is sympathetic to the initiative of the United Russia ruling party to provide weapons to the so-called "DPR" and "LPR", but there is no reaction on this matter at the moment.

Russia may transfer man-portable air-defense systems, anti-tank shells, and mines to Donbas, [said](#) Andrei Gurulev, a member of the State Duma Defense Committee. [According to Viktor Vodolatsky](#), first deputy chairman of the Russian State Duma Committee on CIS Affairs and Relations with Compatriots, in case of such a decision by the Russian president, the supply of weapons can be made within a few hours.

The speaker of the Russian parliament, Vyacheslav Volodin, [said](#) that consultations with the heads of the State Duma factions on an appeal to the Russian president to recognize the so-called "DPR" and "LPR" are scheduled for next week, and that the document will be [considered](#) by the Duma Council in February. Commenting on the initiative, the Russian Federation Council [said](#) that it was unacceptable to put pressure on the country's leadership on such issues. The Kremlin [declined to comment](#) on the proposal to recognize the so-called "L/DPR" until the draft appeal has been officially considered by the State Duma.

At the same time, the acting first deputy head of the Ukrainian delegation to the Trilateral Contact Group, Andrey Kostin, [noted](#) that the Communist Party's proposal does not correspond to Moscow's current position in the Minsk and Normandy format negotiations and he saw no preconditions for the State Duma to support this decision.

INCREASING ESCALATION, ASSESSMENTS OF THE SECURITY SITUATION DIFFER

Attempts by Ukraine and Western countries to influence the escalation situation through diplomatic means continue.

On January 21, US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov held talks in Geneva. The US secretary of state [suggested](#) that Russia withdraw its troops and begin talks to confirm that there are no plans for an

invasion, noting that US President Joe Biden is willing to meet with Vladimir Putin again. Blinken recalled that if any Russian troops launch an invasion of Ukraine, a "rapid, united, tough response" would follow. In addition, he stressed that the US was prepared to respond proportionately to Russia's nonmilitary measures against Ukraine as well. [Commenting on the outcome of the talks](#), Sergey Lavrov said that the US position on what is happening on the Russian-Ukrainian border is unfounded and the threat of invasion is fictitious. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe [called](#) on the Russian authorities to withdraw troops from the Ukrainian border as soon as possible and stop the escalation.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Berbock, speaking at a Bundestag debate on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, [stressed](#) that the Kremlin's demands for so-called "security guarantees" contradicted the basics of the security order in Europe and warned that sanctions that would follow in case of further military action against Ukraine would also affect Russia's Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline. She said the need for dialogue with Russia should be promoted, while making clear that the sovereign equality of countries and the foundations of the European peace order cannot be negotiated.

[According to The Wall Street Journal sources](#), many Western defense officials believe that Russia is "finalizing preparations for an invasion of Ukraine" by sending medical units to the border. However, these steps do not mean that an attack is imminent, but they are preconditions for military action. It is noted that assessments of the security situation differ.

For example, the US State Department [authorized](#) the voluntary departure of employees of the embassy in Kyiv and instructed their families to leave "due to the threat of military action from Russia, which persists. The British embassy is also [recalling](#) part of its staff. The EU, for its part, [is not going to remove the diplomats' families](#) while security talks with Russia are ongoing. The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry [described](#) such decisions as premature, saying that there had been no significant changes to the security situation recently.

The White House [believes](#) that Russia's actions on the Ukrainian border are aggressive and could be preparation for an invasion, even though Kyiv [claims](#) that such an offensive is physically impossible at the moment.

At the same time, almost half of Ukrainians perceive the accumulation of Russian troops near the borders of the country as a real threat of invasion in winter-spring 2022. These data were obtained from a sociological survey [conducted](#) by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology on January 20-21. At that, more than a half of the respondents (56.5%) think that the Ukrainian authorities are not doing enough diplomatic and defense efforts to prevent an invasion; a similar number of respondents (58%) think that negotiations with Russia should be held only in the presence of Western partners.

NORMANDY FORMAT LEADERS' ADVISORS HELD A MEETING

On January 26, the advisors of the Normandy format leaders met in Paris to discuss disputes over the Minsk agreements. The parties agreed to meet in two weeks in Berlin to try to find ways to resolve the conflict in Donbas. The head of the Ukrainian presidential office, Andriy Yermak, [noted](#) that the sides expressed their desire to work through their differences and supported a sustainable cease-fire in Donbas, which should remain unconditional, [adding](#) that Ukraine continues to insist on involving Germany and France in the mechanism to verify the cease-fire in Donbas. He stressed that the [communiqué](#) adopted at the end of the meeting is the first document that has been agreed since the summit of the Normandy Four leaders in December 2019. At the same time, the deputy head of the Russian presidential administration, Dmitri Kozak, who represented Russia, [said](#) that the summit of the Normandy Four leaders was possible only after the conditions of the special status of Donbas had been agreed, also stressing that the escalation of the situation on the borders of Ukraine had not been discussed during the meeting.

US President Joe Biden [said](#) that he supported the efforts to resolve the conflict in Donbas in the Normandy format, expressing hope that the confirmation of ceasefire conditions by the Normandy format leaders' advisers would help reduce tensions and advance the implementation of the Minsk agreements.

UKRAINE WITHDRAWS BILL ON TRANSITION PERIOD AND PASSES LAW ON PROTECTION OF PERSONS DEPRIVED OF FREEDOM AS A RESULT OF RUSSIAN AGGRESSION

On 24 January, at an extraordinary meeting, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine [withdrew](#) the draft law "On the foundations of the state policy of the transition period" in order to finalize it.

Among the reasons for the withdrawal, Minister for the reintegration of the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine Iryna Vereshchuk cites a number of criticisms from the Venice Commission, as well as the lack of support for the document by the parliamentary body and experts. [According to her](#), the amendments will be designed to introduce more "human-centeredness" into the draft law.

She noted that the provisions on criminal liability, lustration, the right to truthful information, convalidation and the status of Crimea were to be finalized. It is planned that a new version of the bill [will be presented this spring](#).

[According to European Pravda's sources](#), the real reason for the withdrawal of the bill is the demand put forward by the Russian side for the Normandy Four meeting at the level of advisors.

[According to the head of the Ukrainian presidential office, Andriy Yermak](#), the recall of the bill is not related to the meeting of the advisors of the Normandy Four leaders, no preconditions for the Normandy format meeting were put forward. [Experts' opinions](#) about the reasons and justification for the recall of the draft law were divided.

On January 26, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine [adopted](#) the Law "[On social and legal protection of persons in respect of whom the deprivation of personal liberty as a](#)

[result of armed aggression against Ukraine and members of their families has been established](#)". The law contains a list of persons who fall within its scope - it includes captured servicemen, civilian hostages, as well as political prisoners. Among other things, the law provides for the creation of a commission to establish the fact of deprivation of freedom, the order of payment of financial aid to victims and members of their families, the right to medical and rehabilitation assistance, including psychological assistance, and the procedure for legal support.

HEARINGS ON THE ADMISSIBILITY OF THE CASE OF UKRAINE AND THE NETHERLANDS V. RUSSIA WERE HELD AT THE ECHR

On January 26, the European Court of Human Rights held an [oral hearing](#) on the admissibility of the general interstate case "Ukraine and the Netherlands against Russia".

In the case against Russia, the ECHR consolidated three complaints: two of them, about human rights violations during the events related to the conflict in Donbas and about sending orphans from an orphanage in Luhansk to Russia for treatment, were filed by Ukraine, and the third one, in support of the application of relatives of 298 people who died in the crash of Boeing MH17 in the sky over Donbas in July 2014, was filed by the Netherlands. The positions of the parties were heard, and the court should decide in the coming months whether to continue to consider the complaints of Ukraine and the Netherlands in principle.

[BBC](#) and the Center for Human Rights "[ZMINA](#)" tell about the course of the hearing and its significance.

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PASSPORTIZATION, DIMINISHED CITIZENSHIP RIGHTS, AND THE DONBAS VOTE IN RUSSIA'S 2021 DUMA ELECTIONS

Harvard University's Institute for Ukrainian Studies has released a report on Russian passportization of the Donbas. According to the researchers, passportization could serve as a tool for Russia to extraterritorialize Donbas while keeping violence relatively low, or a tool to justify full-scale military intervention in Ukraine to "protect" its citizens from alleged "genocide". The authors of the report also analyzed the participation of "L/DPR" residents with Russian passports in the 2021 Russian State Duma elections and came to the conclusion that the presence of Donbas residents at the corresponding polling stations in the Rostov region adds 25% to the result of the ruling party "United Russia", which also plays into the hands of the current government. The full text of the report is available at the [link](#).