

HIGHLIGHTS

PULSE OF PEACE IN DONBAS



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NATO WARNS OF GROWING DANGER OF NEW RUSSIAN INVASION – UKRAINE ARGUES THAT SUCH THREAT IS INSIGNIFICANT

Russia could attack Ukraine in various forms, including the annexation of Donbas. This assumption was [made](#) by Jake Sullivan, National Security Advisor to the President of the United States. The US also considers a cyber attack or a full-scale invasion as possible scenarios. A group of US senators from the Intelligence Committee [called](#) on President Joe Biden to give Ukraine maximum access to intelligence. The senators stressed that this was in the national security interests of the US and its allies and partners in the region.

[According to the Conflict Intelligence Team](#), Russia continues to move weapons to Ukraine's borders and needs up to two more weeks to complete possible preparations for a potential major attack. The ongoing situation with the strengthening of the Russian military presence near the borders was also [confirmed](#) by US State Department spokeswoman Jalina Porter.

The White House has approved a Pentagon plan to station American troops in Poland in case Americans in Ukraine need to evacuate in case of a new Russian invasion, The Wall Street Journal [reported](#).

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg [warned](#) of the growing risk of a new Russian military invasion of Ukraine. Noting the threatening rhetoric from Russia, he stresses that there is not much time to prevent such a development.

At the same time, Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov [argues](#) that the threat of a significant escalation in Ukraine by Russia is low. At the same time, the

most realistic scenario of a provocation by Russia may be an attempt to destabilize inside Ukraine, and a repeat of the 2014 scenario is now [impossible](#).

MEETINGS OF TCG AND ADVISORS IN THE NORMANDY FORMAT: PLANS AND OUTCOMES

On February 9, a meeting of the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) and working subgroups [took place](#). The humanitarian working group discussed the opening of crossing points at Zolote and Shchastia in the Luhansk region and possibilities for easing restrictions of movement related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Exchange of detainees was also discussed.

The economic working group considered issues related to water supply and the environment, including environmental risks associated with the flooding of mines along the contact line.

[According to the Ukrainian media outlet ZN.UA](#), on the eve of the meeting, representatives of the so-called "L/DPR" addressed a letter to Ambassador Mikko Kinnunen, the special representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine and the TCG. They claim that at the meeting at the level of political advisers of the heads of the Normandy format countries, held in Paris on January 26, the Ukrainian side, under guarantees from Germany and France, undertook to provide the TCG with a written response to proposals for the peaceful settlement of the conflict in Donbas in order to begin with the "L/DPR" their discussion and agreement.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba [denied](#) the possibility of direct negotiations with the so-called "DPR" and "LPR" called for by Russia. Predicting the course of the Normandy format leaders' advisory meeting, which began February 10 in Berlin, he noted that the only option for diplomatic influence on the situation is to discuss and find a solution without crossing existing red lines. He called the purpose of this meeting the unblocking of the work of the TCG.

He also [noted](#) that preparations were being made for further meetings in a similar format. [According to the head of the Office of the President of Ukraine](#), Andriy Yermak, who leads the Ukrainian delegation at these talks, it also intends to propose initiatives to improve the verification of the full ceasefire in the east of the country and raise the issue of unblocking the mutual release of detainees and the opening of checkpoints on the contact line. During the nine-hour talks, the sides were [unable to agree](#) on a joint statement. However, Andriy Yermak noted that everyone agrees on "unblocking and intensifying the work of the Trilateral Contact Group". The next meeting of the TCG is to be held on March 2.

THE PRESIDENT OF FRANCE HELD TALKS WITH THE HEADS OF UKRAINE AND RUSSIA

On February 8, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and French President Emmanuel Macron held talks in Kyiv, one of the key topics being problems of the peace process. Following the talks, Volodymyr Zelensky [noted](#) that the partnership of

the two states in the field of security is of particular importance, as Ukraine and France have a common vision of current threats and challenges to security for Ukraine, Europe and the world as a whole. He noted that France plays an active role within the framework of the Normandy format and expressed confidence that it will soon be possible to hold the next talks of the Normandy Four leaders. For his part, Emmanuel Macron [noted](#) the balanced approach of Ukraine in politics, despite the concentration of troops on the Ukrainian borders. He reaffirmed the commitment of France and Germany to the role of mediators in the settlement of the conflict in the Normandy format, adding that a joint mechanism to guarantee security in Europe should be developed in the near future.

On February 7, French President Emmanuel Macron visited Moscow, where he held talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

At a joint [press conference](#) following the talks, Emmanuel Macron said that the coming days would be crucial for Russia to de-escalate the situation around Ukraine, while in order to stabilize the situation, concrete measures must be agreed upon in negotiations and consultations with the United States, NATO, the EU and Ukraine. The French president noted that an increase in tension and the level of escalation was not in the interests of either Russia or the EU, noting that disagreements on crucial issues – such as the open door principle for NATO – persisted. At the same time, he said, all sides have a desire to guarantee a new order of stability and security in Europe, and specific security guarantees have been offered to Moscow.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said at the same news conference that NATO and the US have completely ignored key Russian demands in their written responses, while noting that he considers a number of proposals by Emmanuel Macron promising. He reiterated that there was no alternative to the Minsk agreements for resolving the conflict in Donbas and expressed dissatisfaction with Ukraine's refusal to negotiate directly with the so-called "L/DPR".

Following his visit to Moscow, Emmanuel Macron [said](#) that he had achieved his goal of preventing the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine and opening new prospects for a way out of the current situation. The Financial Times newspaper, citing unnamed French officials, [claims](#) that Macron and Putin managed to agree on measures to de-escalate tensions around Ukraine, including the withdrawal of about 30,000 Russian troops from Belarus after the exercises, as well as Vladimir Putin's promise not to take "military initiatives".

Russian Presidential press secretary Dmitry Peskov [denied](#) any information about such an agreement.

For a summary of the negotiations, [see](#) the BBC article.

VISIT OF THE GERMAN FOREIGN MINISTER TO UKRAINE

On February 7-8, German Foreign Minister Annalena Berbock [visited](#) Ukraine. During the visit, Berbock discussed with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba the activation of the Normandy format and deterring Russia from further aggression. Dmytro Kuleba thanked Annalena Berbock for Germany's efforts to prepare a meeting of political advisors of the Normandy Format leaders in Berlin.

Particular attention was paid to the implementation of a comprehensive package to deter Russia from a new wave of aggression against Ukraine, in particular economic sanctions. Annalena Berbock [confirmed](#) Germany's readiness "to pay a high economic price" if sanctions against Russia are imposed. At the same time, she noted that the responsibility for de-escalating the situation in the conflict around Ukraine lies with Russia.

Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba [said](#) after the talks that Ukraine and Germany had found common ground on the issue of defense support for Kyiv.

Negotiations planned for the same day between Annalena Berbock and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky were canceled. [According to CNN journalist Jake Tapper](#), citing a source close to the Ukrainian government, the reason was that Annalena Berbock did not guarantee that Germany would not give up the Nord Stream-2 gas pipeline in case of a Russian invasion of Ukraine, as well as the current German ban on providing military assistance to Ukraine.

A few days earlier, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz [said](#) that a possible invasion of Ukraine "would cost Russia a great deal. According to the chancellor, Germany is NATO's largest partner in continental Europe and is working closely with NATO allies and the United States on how to respond to the Russian threat to Ukraine. On February 14, Olaf Scholz [will make](#) his first official visit to Ukraine.

THE MINISTRY FOR REINTEGRATION OF THE TEMPORARY OCCUPIED TERRITORIES PROPOSES TO DEVELOP A MECHANISM TO CONFIRM THE EDUCATION RECEIVED IN THE "L/DPR"

The Ministry for Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine put forward an initiative to create a mechanism that would allow to confirm the educational qualifications obtained in the temporarily non-government-controlled parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Representatives of Ukrainian NGOs involved in the protection of the rights of victims of the armed conflict [published](#) an appeal in support of the initiative. They note that at the moment in Ukraine there is no mechanism through which citizens who received education in the occupied territories have the opportunity to confirm their knowledge in order to continue their education or employment. At the same time, the appeal stresses that it is not about the recognition of educational documents issued by illegal authorities in the temporarily occupied territories.

At the end of January, a specialized working group, a joint initiative of the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry for Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories, was [created](#) to develop a corresponding draft law, but this initiative almost immediately encountered [criticism](#), including from universities.

The NCOs who signed the appeal emphasize that supporting children and youth and creating conditions for their education and development in the free territory of Ukraine is an important component of the policy of maintaining ties with the citizens of Ukraine living in the temporarily occupied territories. At the same time, according to the results of the [survey](#) conducted by the non-governmental organization Donbas

SOS, 70% of applicants who came to enter Ukrainian universities from the temporarily occupied territories faced difficulties during the admission campaign of 2021.

The ZMINA Center for Human Rights explains why the launch of this initiative is essential. Radio Svoboda has more on the situation.