

## HIGHLIGHTS

# PULSE OF PEACE IN DONBAS



№73, 11–21 February, 2022

### THE RUSSIAN SECURITY COUNCIL SUPPORTED THE IDEA OF RECOGNIZING THE "L/DPR" - PUTIN SIGNED THE APPROPRIATE DECREES

On February 21, the leaders of the so-called "DPR" and "LPR" addressed the Russian president with a request to recognize the independence of the "republics." On the same day, Putin convened an expanded meeting of the Security Council to recognize the independence of the "L/DPR" – all participants supported the proposal. After the meeting, Putin [told](#) Macron and Scholz that "Russia will recognize the 'LPR' and 'DPR,'" and later delivered an address to the nation, where he confirmed his intention and [signed relevant decrees](#) and treaties of friendship with the "L/DPR". In the same decrees, Putin ordered that the Russian Armed Forces "perform peacekeeping functions" in the self-proclaimed republics of Donbas.

Earlier on February 15, the Russian State Duma [called](#) on President Vladimir Putin to recognize the so-called "D/LPR" as "independent, sovereign and independent states."

Two draft resolutions were submitted to the Duma. One, by deputies from the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF), [called](#) for the document to be sent directly to the president, while the other, by deputies from the United Russia party, called for consultations with the Russian Foreign Ministry regarding compliance with international agreements, including the Minsk agreements. The first draft was supported by a majority vote, according to which the State Duma expressed support for "adequate measures taken for humanitarian purposes to support residents of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine

who have expressed a desire to speak and write in Russian, who wish to maintain freedom of religion, and who disagree with the actions of the Ukrainian authorities that violate their rights and freedoms". The Ukrainian position in the document is called "genocide".

On the eve of the vote, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba [said](#) that the recognition of the so-called " L/DPR" would mean a de facto withdrawal of Russia from the Minsk agreements.

The [US](#) and [EU](#) condemned the decision, stressing that it was a clear violation of the Minsk agreements. In a subsequent [statement](#), US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken stressed that Russia's recognition of the so-called " L/DPR" would be a gross violation of international law and would call into question Russia's stated commitments to continue diplomacy to peacefully resolve the crisis, and would require a swift and tough response from the US together with its allies and partners. Experts [emphasize](#) that Russia may seek to evade sanctions by using the issue of recognition of the "L/DPR" to legitimize its presence in Donbas and impose its conditions on Ukraine. For Ukraine, however, Russia's hybrid attack could be just as devastating as the more classic one. In their view, the international community should qualify the recognition of the "republics" as an act of aggression, which should entail the harshest consequences.

## INTELLIGENCE REPORT ON RUSSIA'S MILITARY BUILDUP ON THE BORDER WITH UKRAINE

On 11 February, US Presidential National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan [said](#) that Russia might launch an invasion of Ukraine without waiting for the completion of the Beijing Olympics on 20 February. On February 12, US President Joe Biden [stressed](#) in a telephone conversation with Vladimir Putin that the United States was ready to continue diplomatic efforts to de-escalate Russia's military presence on Ukraine's borders, but was equally prepared for other scenarios.

Although US officials did not give an exact date for a likely invasion, American intelligence officials [warned](#) NATO allies about a possible Russian attack on Ukraine, which according to their information, could take place on February 16. The secretary of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine, Oleksiy Danilov, [noted](#) that according to Ukrainian security agencies, a large-scale invasion on that date was highly unlikely, while he did not rule out the possibility of provocations by Russia. He also denied reports about the possibility of closing the airspace over Ukraine for civil aviation.

A statement from the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) [confirmed](#) that a number of countries had decided to withdraw their citizens who are members of the SMM, while the mission will continue to implement the OSCE-approved mandate.

Reacting to such contradictory statements, embassies of more than thirty countries officially [called](#) on their citizens to leave Ukraine as soon as possible due to the threat of Russian invasion. A number of embassies were relocated from Kyiv to other Ukrainian cities, including those of the [United States](#), [Canada](#) and [Australia](#). At the

same time, as [stressed in a statement](#) of the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, it was decided not to move the EU diplomatic missions from Kyiv, they continue to work.

CNN [quoted](#) unnamed US administration officials as saying that U.S. intelligence deliberately provided the White House with declassified data on escalation scenarios. This was part of a plan to contain the Kremlin, and according to a White House source, there are indications that this strategy has worked.

On February 15, the Russian Defense Ministry [announced](#) the return of some troops to their permanent deployment points at the end of the exercises, including units of the Southern Military District and the Western Military District. Commenting on these statements, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg [noted](#) that the preservation of military equipment near Ukraine could allow Russia to quickly return troops to the border, so for real de-escalation to occur, not only the return of the military to the places of permanent deployment, but also the withdrawal of heavy military equipment. At the same time, there is [no evidence](#) to support Russia's statements about the withdrawal of troops, the US and Britain [claim](#) that Russia continues to build up its troops on the border, and US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken [notes](#) that a new round of Russian aggression against Ukraine in various formats, including through provocations, is possible in the coming days. In his view, widespread coverage of potential escalation options could be a way to avoid it.

## THE SITUATION IN DONBAS ESCALATED SHARPLY

On 17 February, the situation along the line of contact in Donbas sharply escalated. [According to the Joint Forces Operation Headquarters](#), there were 60 ceasefire violations by illegal armed groups during the day, 43 of which involved the use of weapons prohibited by the Minsk agreements. This included the shelling of a kindergarten building and a railway station in Stanytsia Luhanska (Luhansk Region territory controlled by the Ukrainian Government). Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba [called](#) on Ukraine's partners to immediately condemn the shelling of Stanytsia Luhanska by the occupants.

The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) recorded about 500 explosions near the line of contact in the east of Ukraine between the evening of February 16 and the morning of February 17. This was [reported](#) by the head of the mission, Yashar Halit Chevik, at a meeting of the UN Security Council. The total number of explosions is several times higher than in previous days. Thus, as of the evening of February 15, the SMM [recorded](#) 76 explosions.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg [noted](#) NATO's concern over Russia's possible attempts to create a pretext for an armed attack on Ukraine in this way, a similar position was [voiced](#) by US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, adding that the US and NATO allies are monitoring the situation on the border between Russia and Ukraine, in particular, over possible provocations from the Russian side.

The Ukrainian delegation [initiated](#) an extraordinary meeting of the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) due to the escalation of the security situation. Additionally, a joint

meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council and the Forum for Security Cooperation was [held](#) on 18 February. The meeting was convened by Ukraine in order to obtain clarifications on the movement of Russian troops. Russia was not present at the meeting.

[According to experts](#), this situation in Donbas is a provocation by Russia in order to prepare the ground for an expansion of aggression.

## THE "L/DPR" ANNOUNCED THE "EVACUATION" OF CIVILIANS AND GENERAL MOBILIZATION

On February 18, "due to rising tensions in the region," the "heads" of the so-called "L/DPR" [announced](#) the forced "evacuation" of civilians to Russia. The government of the Rostov region declared its readiness to accept up to 10,000 people. Putin signed a decree to allocate 10 thousand rubles to each "refugee". Bellingcat investigator Arik Toller [pointed out](#) that the metadata of the video appeals of the "heads" of the so-called "L/DPR" indicate an earlier date of recording the appeals: according to the metadata, the video with an appeal to "evacuation" was recorded on February 16, but Pushilin in his speech said that he was addressing the residents "today, February 18". This may indicate that the forced "evacuation" and mobilization are not a response to real tension, but a planned action.

The next day, February 19, the "L/DPR" announced a general mobilization. The corresponding decree was [signed](#) by the "leader" of the "DPR," Denis Pushilin. Soon general mobilization was also announced in the so-called "LPR." Ukraine's ruling party "Sluga naroda" stated that Kyiv did not consider the possibility of liberating the occupied territories of Donbas by military means.

## RUSSIAN MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS PUBLISHED A COMMENTARY ON THE U.S. RESPONSE TO THE DEMANDS FOR SECURITY GUARANTEES.

The Russian Foreign Ministry issued a response to US Ambassador Jake Sullivan regarding the US response to Russia's demands for "security guarantees." The text of the reaction was [published](#) on the Foreign Ministry's website. With regard to NATO's refusal to accept Ukraine, Russia said that it had no constructive response to the proposed draft treaty on security guarantees. Russia also accuses NATO of plans to establish military bases on the territory of former Soviet and non-member states.

The demands to withdraw troops from the areas bordering Ukraine were described as unacceptable and undermining the possibility of reaching agreements. At the same time, it was stated that Russia was concerned about "the growing military activity of the United States and NATO directly near Russian borders. In addition, the Russian side claims that a military invasion of Ukraine is not planned, and refers to the situation in Donbas as "the result of processes that took place inside Ukraine".

To de-escalate the situation, Russia put forward a number of conditions, including forcing Ukraine to implement the Minsk agreements and the corresponding set of measures, stopping the supply of weapons to Ukraine, recalling all Western advisers and instructors, refusing NATO countries from any joint exercises with the Ukrainian armed forces, and withdrawing all previously supplied weapons from Ukrainian territory. In case of refusal to negotiate, Moscow threatened to use "measures of a military and technical nature".

Earlier, Russian presidential spokesman Dmitry Peskov [said](#) that Ukraine's official refusal to join NATO would help formulate a response to Russia's concerns about security guarantees.

At a plenary meeting of the OSCE Forum for Security Cooperation on 16 February, the head of the Russian delegation, Konstantin Gavrillov, [stressed](#) that Russia would continue to insist on a public rejection by NATO of the possibility of Ukraine joining the alliance and proclaiming Ukraine a neutral, non-aligned status.

## GERMAN CHANCELLOR HOLDS TALKS IN UKRAINE AND RUSSIA

On February 14 and 15, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz visited Ukraine and Russia, where the main topic of the talks was the security situation. The day before he [said](#) that he was expecting signs of de-escalation on the part of Russia, with the purpose of the visit to Kyiv being support and solidarity with Ukraine.

During [talks](#) with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, both sides agreed that the escalation on the Ukrainian-Russian border was an unprecedented challenge for Europe and the world. Olaf Scholz expressed Germany's full support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within the internationally recognized borders, as well as its readiness to continue supporting Ukraine. He noted that Germany is trying to find a diplomatic solution to the situation, including by intensifying efforts in the Normandy format.

Also, the security risks associated with Nord Stream-2 were [discussed](#) in detail at the meeting. Volodymyr Zelensky stressed that Ukraine considers this project to be a geopolitical weapon, which poses a threat to the security of the country and the region as a whole. In this regard, he noted the importance of energy security guarantees for Ukraine, including Germany's readiness to become a guarantor of the extension of gas transit through Ukraine.

Deutsche Welle [offers](#) an analysis of Olaf Scholz's visit to Ukraine.

Following the talks in Ukraine, Olaf Scholz [visited](#) Russia, where he held talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin on February 15. He expressed his concern over the news about the concentration of Russian troops near Ukraine's borders and called the claim of their partial withdrawal a good sign. He also called for continued negotiations with Russia, including on the issue of so-called "security guarantees," noting the existing differences between the parties. Olaf Scholz also stressed that Germany supports the integrity of Ukraine and that further Russian aggression against Ukraine would lead to negative consequences. Commenting on the Russian State Duma's appeal for the recognition of certain areas of Donbas, Olaf Scholz

noted that a possible recognition by Russia of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions would be a political disaster and a violation of the Minsk agreements. Speaking about the talks in Ukraine that preceded his visit to Russia, Olaf Scholz stressed that Ukraine would soon submit a number of draft laws for discussion in the TCG, in particular on the "special status" of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. The Chancellor specified that these bills would make it impossible for Russia to block the negotiation process.

In response, Vladimir Putin said that Moscow must "do everything to solve the problems of Donbas," while adhering to the letter of the Minsk agreements.

An overview of the opinions of German media is available [here](#).

German experts' opinions on the results of Olaf Scholz's talks in Russia [differ](#), while it is noted that they gave hope for the continuation of the diplomatic way to resolve the escalation situation.