

## HIGHLIGHTS

# PULSE OF PEACE IN DONBAS



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## RUSSIAN OFFENSIVE IN UKRAINE STALLED, RUSSIAN ARMY TARGETS CIVILIANS

The Pentagon [notes](#) that Russia's offensive in Ukraine has stalled in almost all directions. The reason for the failures cites the tough resistance put up by Ukrainian troops. It is noted that the death toll of the Russian army may range from 5 to 9 thousand people, with all 100% (about 150 thousand soldiers) currently involved, who were supposed to invade and occupy the entire territory of Ukraine in the shortest possible time. [According to the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine](#), as of March 16, the total losses of the Russian armed forces amounted to 13.8 thousand people, with the calculation being difficult due to the high intensity of hostilities.

On the situation as of the morning of March 17, see [here](#).

The overall situation in Mariupol is catastrophic, the city is under constant bombardment by aircraft and artillery of the Russian occupation forces. A ceasefire has not been established, delivery of humanitarian aid is [impossible](#), and evacuation buses are not allowed into the city. Mariupol Deputy Mayor Sergey Orlov believes that the city is currently 80-90% destroyed. On March 15, the Russian military took doctors and patients of the Regional Intensive Care Hospital in Mariupol [hostage](#).

On the afternoon of March 16, Russian aviation dropped a heavy-duty bomb on the [Drama Theater](#) in the center of the city, which had served as an officially declared [shelter](#) for about a thousand civilians since early March. Because of fierce fighting it was impossible to reach the rubble and determine the number of victims, they only

began to dismantle it the next day – it is reported that the bomb shelter [survived](#) the blast. Satellite images [show](#) that there were "children" signs in front and behind the building to warn Russian pilots that the shelter was located here. The Russian Defense Ministry [said](#) their planes were not involved in the bombing. The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry [said](#) that all those involved in the crime would be held criminally responsible in international courts and called for increased sanctions pressure on Russia.

[According to Pyotr Andryushchenko](#), adviser to the mayor of Mariupol, the number of victims of Russian shelling may be approaching 20,000, but the official and confirmed information as of the end of March 14, 2022 is approximately [2,357 dead](#).

[Attempts to create a humanitarian corridor](#) to evacuate Mariupol residents in private cars have not fully succeeded, as Russian military forces are [shelling](#) refugees. [On March 14](#), 4,000 people managed to evacuate the city, [on March 15](#) about 20,000 people managed to evacuate and [on March 16](#) about 6,500 people managed to evacuate the city.

An interview about the situation in the city with Mariupol's deputy mayor was [published](#) by Forbes, and the Associated Press is [reporting](#) from the city. The story of one Mariupol resident is [here](#).

In Kharkiv, as of March 15, [600 homes](#) had been completely destroyed, with shelling of residential areas and civilian infrastructure [continuing](#) around the clock, causing [fires](#). At the same time, local authorities [point out](#) that it will not be possible to occupy Kharkiv. The critical point of the Kharkiv region remains the encircled city of Izyum, whose residents are deprived of light, heat, electricity, and mobile communications.

[Shelling](#) and [air strikes](#) continue in [Kyiv](#), [Chernihiv](#), Mykolaiv, [Volnovakha](#) and other cities, targeting [residential areas](#), hospitals, universities and places where people congregate. A large number of civilians remain in the cities (see a report on the situation in Kyiv [here](#)), and territorial defense forces are also [active](#). The Prosecutor's Office of Ukraine has opened an [investigation](#) into a violation of the laws and customs of war combined with premeditated murder. Photos show the situation in Ukraine on March [14](#), [15](#) and [16](#).

Russia has resorted to the tactic of shelling occupied cities, intending to further blame Ukraine for what happened. For example, on March 14, a Tochka-U rocket filled with cluster munitions was [fired](#) at Donetsk. The Center for Countering Disinformation under the National Security and Defense Council [denied](#) the shelling of Donetsk by the Ukrainian military. An analysis carried out by the Conflict Intelligence Team makes it possible to [confirm](#) that the missile launch was a provocation of the Russian armed forces and was carried out from the territory under their control.

Russian propaganda continues to try to create the impression that the residents of Ukraine "agree" with the war. For example, on March 14, representatives of the Russian Ministry of Defense [held a briefing](#) in which they stated that the residents of 13 regions of Ukraine allegedly want "good relations" with the aggressor country. On March 16, it was [announced](#) that a "Committee for Salvation "For Peace and Order" was created in Kherson, which included local pro-Russian politicians and collaborators. Protests against the Russian occupation continue – one action took

place in [Tokmak](#) (Zaporizhzhia region), with Russian military forces [obstructing](#) them, including by kidnapping participants. In Skadovsk (Kherson Oblast), the mayor was [kidnapped](#) and released later. Also on March 16, Melitopol mayor Ivan Fedorov, who had previously been kidnapped by Russian forces, was [released](#) from captivity after being [exchanged](#) for nine Russian soldiers. Over 70 organizations [signed](#) an appeal to the international community in connection with the kidnapping and murder of Ukrainian activists, human rights defenders, volunteers, journalists, and local government officials living in the territories of the regions of Ukraine partially occupied by the Russian army. The appeal calls for compelling the Russian Federation to stop human rights violations and adhere to the provisions of the Geneva Convention on the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and for international organizations to spread information about the pressure put on civilians by the Russian Armed Forces as much as possible.

Ukrainian Interior Minister Denis Monastyrsky [notes](#) that after the end of the war with Russia, it will take Ukraine several years just to carry out demining.

Ukrainian Prime Minister Denis Shmygal [says](#) Ukraine will need at least \$565 billion to rebuild itself. Ukraine will work to have Russia's funds and property abroad seized. The United States has [announced](#) the launch of a special group to search for and seize the assets of Russian elites and oligarchs, as well as the front men used by them. The group includes the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Japan, Germany, France, Italy, and the European Commission. From each of these countries, the group will include representatives of the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of the Interior.

## INTERNATIONAL POLITICS: MORE SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA AND MORE ARMS TO UKRAINE

On March 15, the EU Council finally [approved](#) the fourth package of sanctions against Russia, adding 15 more individuals and nine more entities to the sanctions list - key oligarchs, lobbyists and propagandists who promote the Kremlin's narrative on the situation in Ukraine. In addition, the EU Council imposed sectoral sanctions, banning all transactions with a number of state-owned enterprises, imposing stricter export restrictions on dual-use goods and technologies, banning new investments in the Russian energy sector, and imposing comprehensive export restrictions on equipment, technology and services for the energy industry, as well as additional restrictions on trade in iron and steel. The sanctions were imposed on companies in the aviation, military, shipbuilding and machine-building industries.

European Union states [intend](#) to introduce new sanctions against the largest Russian oil companies Rosneft, Transneft and Gazprom Neft, but will continue to buy oil from them for now. The companies will also face an investment ban, which is expected to freeze their funding from EU sources for new production and exploration projects for all fossil fuels.

Switzerland [adopted](#) additional European Union sanctions against Russian individuals and entities released on March 15 in response to Russia's invasion of

Ukraine – 197 more people were subject to financial sanctions and travel restrictions, and financial sanctions were imposed on nine companies. The Swiss sanctions list is now fully in line with the EU list. For the first time, [Serbia](#) joined the EU restrictive measures. Britain [added](#) 350 people and companies to the sanctions list, also announcing a ban on exports of luxury goods to Russia and imposing new duties on imports of key goods. New individual sanctions were imposed by [Canada](#) and [Japan](#). The United States [announced](#) sanctions against high-ranking military officials and key employees of the Russian defense industry.

On March 15, a number of World Trade Organization member countries [notified](#) that they reserved the right to halt concessions and other commitments on Russia. A joint statement was signed by the European Union, the United States, Canada and other G7 countries, which intend to strip Russia of its most-favored-nation treatment. Experts [note](#) that this decision is extremely important: one of the key obstacles to restricting Russian imports is Russia's membership of the World Trade Organization, and WTO procedures do not provide for expulsion of a member country from the organization. However, stopping the most-favored-nation regime would de facto nullify Russia's WTO membership and allow it to block Russian imports.

European Commissioner for the Economy Paolo Gentiloni [said](#) that EU economic sanctions have an impact, but they are not enough to stop Russia's war against Ukraine - arms supplies are needed.

U.S. President Joe Biden [announced](#) the allocation of an additional \$800 million in aid to Ukraine. In addition, the U.S. will [provide](#) Ukraine with air defense systems to counter Russian aggression. Joe Biden also assured that the U.S., together with its allies, will do everything to bring this tragic and futile war to an end and will continue to put pressure on the Russian economy. [Slovakia](#) also tentatively agreed to provide Ukraine with a S-300 air defense system to protect it against Russian airstrikes. The United Kingdom [promised](#) a Starstreak man-portable air defense system capable of engaging air targets at an altitude of up to 7 km.

## RUSSIA EXPELLED FROM THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE, ATTEMPTS AT DIPLOMATIC INFLUENCE CONTINUE IN VARIOUS VENUES

On March 15, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs [reported](#) that the Council of Europe (CoE) Secretary General Maria Pejcinovic-Buric was handed a notice of withdrawal of Russia from the organization. According to the Statute of the Council of Europe, the legal termination of membership will take place at the end of the current financial year.

However, on the same day, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) [decided](#) to [expe](#)l Russia from the Council of Europe immediately due to its incompatibility with the organization's principles. Despite the expulsion of Russia, PACE [seeks](#) to continue supporting non-state institutions that oppose Vladimir Putin's dictatorship. PACE instructs the Council of Europe to "support and cooperate with human rights activists, democratic forces, free media, and independent civil society in Russia. Funding for this is expected to be provided by the remaining

members of the CoE. The decision also proposes "increased support for CoE states that have received large numbers of Ukrainian refugees."

PACE also called on all states remaining in the organization after Russia's expulsion "to consider increasing their assistance to Ukraine in its work to strengthen protection of its territory, including its airspace, in order to reduce the human losses and tragic humanitarian consequences of Russia's war of conquest.

Russia thus [became](#) the first country in history to be expelled from the Council of Europe.

On March 16, Russia also ceased to be a member of the European Convention on Human Rights. In its turn, the European Court of Human Rights temporarily [suspended](#) consideration of all the complaints against Russia and will not return to it until it has assessed the legal consequences of the resolution. The human rights center Memorial describes the [consequences](#) of the exclusion: now, it will only be possible to submit a complaint to the ECHR if the violations were committed prior to this date. In addition, Russia will not be bound by international obligations to renounce the death penalty.

The International Court of Justice at the UN in The Hague continues to hear Ukraine's case against Russia for alleged violations of the Genocide Convention. It pointed to Russia's need to halt the military operation launched on February 24, noting that no private groups or forces of international organizations or other states under Russian control can participate in military operations. The court also said that both sides should refrain from exacerbating the dispute. Meduza [covers](#) the proceedings.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba [said](#) that the court ruling was legally binding in accordance with international law. He added that the decision would be a point of reference for other legal and political assessments of Russian aggression.

On March 16, the defense ministers of NATO countries met in Brussels. Polish Defense Minister Mariusz Blaszczak [presented](#) a project for a peacekeeping mission to Ukraine. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg [said](#) at a press conference following the meeting that the participants in the meeting shared the position to support Ukraine and provide weapons to defend against Russia, but would avoid direct involvement of the Alliance in the war. At the same time, the NATO ministers agreed to continue supplying Ukraine with modern equipment and systems of air defence, anti-tank weapons and other types of support.

The Financial Times, quoting sources who took part in the negotiations, [reported](#) that NATO had agreed to continue supplying Ukraine with modern equipment, air defence systems, anti-tank weapons and other types of support.

Ukraine and Russia, said the sides are discussing a 15-point peace agreement that includes Kyiv announcing its refusal to join NATO in exchange for security guarantees from allies and the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine, which entered its territory after Feb. 24.

Russian presidential spokesman Dmitry Peskov [told](#) reporters that Ukraine's possible neutrality, following the example of Austria or Sweden, is being discussed.

Ukrainian presidential adviser Mikhail Podolyak [responded](#) to the publication by saying that it only reflects the position of the Russian side. He explained that

Russia's statements were merely an attempt to show initiative in the negotiations and [stressed](#) that such proposals were not shared by Ukraine, which sought a ceasefire, withdrawal of Russian troops, and "absolute security guarantees" - more effective than the Budapest Memorandum proved to be in practice. Israel has taken on the mission of mediating in the search for peace and an end to Russian aggression against Ukraine, [said](#) Andrei Yermak, head of the Ukrainian presidential office. According to him, Ukraine is also engaged in a dialogue with Israel for its participation in the humanitarian component.

The Kremlin [refuses](#) to predict when Russia will agree to sign peace agreements with Ukraine.

On March 16, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky [addressed](#) the U.S. Congress, calling on Americans to show leadership and provide greater support in the fight against Russian aggression. He also called on the U.S. to impose sanctions against Russia on a weekly basis until the end of the war, to impose a no-fly zone over Ukraine, or to provide air defense systems to combat Russian planes and missiles.

He also [proposed](#) the creation of a new international alliance, the U-24 ("United for Peace"), an alliance of states willing to provide all necessary assistance, including arms, sanctions, humanitarian, political and financial support, in 24 hours. He added that the goal of such an association would also be to provide assistance to countries experiencing natural disasters, man-made disasters, a humanitarian crisis or an epidemic.

On March 17, the president of Ukraine [addressed](#) the German Bundestag. Volodymyr Zelenskyy called for unambiguous support for Ukraine and drew attention to the ongoing economic ties between German business and Russia. According to him, the money received by Russia from other countries is used to finance the war. The president recalled that Germany had previously not supported Ukraine's accession to NATO and was now delaying a decision on Ukraine's EU accession. According to him, such actions are building a new wall in Europe and called on Chancellor Olaf Scholz to destroy this wall.

## PUTIN ANNOUNCES CLEANSING SOCIETY OF "NATIONAL TRAITORS"

Russian authorities have launched an unprecedented campaign of pressure on Russians who oppose the war. OVD-Info Project analyzed the repressive campaign in detail in the [report](#) "No to War. How Russian Authorities Fight Anti-War Protests". Click here for a brief [summary](#).

Also, Russia opened its [first criminal case](#) for spreading "false information" about the Russian army.

On March 14, Marina Ovsyannikova, editor of Russia's Channel One, [came out](#) with a poster against war and propaganda during a newscast, reportedly live on air. It later became known that she was fined 30,000 rubles (about \$300), with charges being brought for a video message in which she called to protest against the war. A criminal case is also being considered against her. [According to a columnist of](#)

[Ukrainska Pravda](#), the protest could be a direct action by the Russian side, and is designed to distract the attention of Western countries from the situation in Ukraine. On March 16, Vladimir Putin held a meeting "on measures of social and economic support of Russian regions," during which he made a [speech](#) dedicated to the war in Ukraine. He stated that Russia was "forced" to attack Ukraine, called the actions of the Russian army in Ukraine "successful," and stressed that the war was going according to plan and that the Russian armed forces were "doing everything to avoid civilian casualties". A special part of the speech was devoted to the "fifth column" opposing the war in Russia. Putin said that Western governments are trying to undermine Russia's social order by using "national traitors" and [announced](#) the "cleansing of society" from them.