

## HIGHLIGHTS

# PULSE OF PEACE IN DONBAS



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### WESTERN POLITICIANS ACCUSE RUSSIA OF USING TALKS TO BUY TIME, SUGGEST PUTIN BE COURT-MARTIALED

Talks between Ukraine and Russia continue in the online format. The head of the Russian delegation at the talks with Ukraine [said](#) that Moscow and Kyiv "brought their positions as close as possible" on Ukraine's neutral status and its non-membership in NATO. Mikhail Podolyak, adviser to the head of the Ukrainian presidential office and a member of the Ukrainian delegation at the talks, [noted](#) that Russian statements on the talks were intended to provoke tension in the media, while Russian positions and requests at the talks have [changed](#) somewhat since the Russian troops failed, in particular they have become "more realistic. The key aspects of the agreement with Russia should be a ceasefire, the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukrainian territory, and Russia's readiness to provide new security guarantees for Ukraine. [According to him](#), it may take from several days to a week and a half to agree on the controversial points in the negotiations with Russia, after which preparations for a possible meeting between the presidents of Ukraine and Russia will begin. Commenting on the course of the negotiations, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky [reiterated](#) that there were compromises that Ukraine would not accept in negotiations with Russia – including compromises on territorial integrity and sovereignty are unacceptable.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson [notes](#) that Ukraine is now "paying the price" for the fact that for years the West did not understand the threat posed by Vladimir Putin. Meanwhile, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has already failed because Putin

underestimated Ukraine's "strength of resistance". British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss [accused](#) Russia of using peace talks with Ukraine as an opportunity to regroup forces. French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian has a [similar position](#). According to him, a ceasefire must first be achieved, and only then will negotiations become possible. He added that if chemical or bacteriological weapons were used in Ukraine, France would not doubt which side did it, and sanctions without any taboos or restrictions would follow.

On March 18, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenski [discussed](#) with the head of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, the path to EU membership. Commenting on the talks, Ursula von der Leyen [said](#) that the EU would continue to support Ukraine, adding that "Ukraine's European path has begun. The EU also [announced](#) that it would provide Ukraine with the second tranche of macrofinancial assistance in the amount of 300 million euros. The deputy head of the Office of the President of Ukraine Ihor Zhovkva [notes](#) that the work of the European Commission to prepare an opinion on Ukraine's readiness to receive candidate status will take place as soon as possible. European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy Oliver Varghei [confirmed](#) the intention of the European Commission to prepare an official conclusion as soon as possible. "Europeyskaya Pravda" [comments](#) on the details of the process.

The Polish government is preparing to present the idea of a [peacekeeping mission](#) in Ukraine at the next NATO summit and at a meeting of the European Council. It is planned to deploy it in parts of the country not occupied by Russia in order to "send a clear signal of disagreement with war crimes." So far, [Denmark](#) has agreed to join such a mission.

Two former British prime ministers have called for an [international tribunal](#) to try Russian President Vladimir Putin. The former British government leaders are among 140 scholars, lawyers and politicians who [signed a petition](#) calling for a legal system modeled on the Nuremberg Trials of Nazi war criminals after World War II. Vladimir Putin's crimes include indiscriminate bombing of civilians, violating the humanitarian ceasefire and "nuclear blackmail. It is noted that although Russia's war crimes are already being investigated by the International Criminal Court, prosecutions require a decision of the UN Security Council, which Russia can veto, so the development of another instrument of justice is especially important.

## QUARTER OF UKRAINE'S POPULATION DISPLACED BY WAR, HUMANITARIAN SITUATION WORSENS

Mariupol has been under siege since the beginning of March. On average, Russian armed forces [drop](#) between 50 and 100 air bombs on the city per day. On March 19, Mariupol authorities [reported](#) that Russian troops launched an airstrike on an art school building where about 400 civilians were sheltering. Many of the dead were under the rubble, which could not be disassembled due to the incessant shelling. There is a de facto [humanitarian catastrophe](#) in the city and surrounding area. Oleksiy Arestovich, adviser to the head of the Ukrainian presidential office, said that

there is no military solution to the situation in Mariupol right now, but political and diplomatic steps are being taken to resolve the humanitarian disaster. The Russian Defense Ministry issued an [ultimatum](#) to surrender the city as a condition for the evacuation of civilians, to which the Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine officially [responded by refusing](#). It is also reported that representatives of the Russian armed forces forcibly [removed](#) several thousand Mariupol residents to [Russian territory](#). There is also continued shelling of other cities in the [Donetsk region](#), Kyiv ([1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#)) and Kyiv region, Kharkiv ([1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#)) and region, Chernihiv ([1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#)), Mykolaiv ([1](#)), Rubizhne, Severodonetsk and [other cities](#) in the [Luhansk](#) region, [Zaporizhia](#), Sumy. There is no electricity, water, heating in Chernihiv for almost two weeks, a similar situation in some settlements of Kharkiv, Kyiv, Mykolaiv, Luhansk and Donetsk regions.

On March 17, 3,810 people were [evacuated](#) from various settlements overnight, on March 18, 9,145 people [managed to be evacuated](#) by humanitarian corridors, on March 19 – [6,623 people](#), on March 20 – [7,295 people](#), on March 21 – [8,057 people](#). The WHO [notes](#) that Russian troops are preventing the delivery of humanitarian aid from the UN to Sumy and Mariupol.

[Protests continue](#) in Ukrainian cities occupied by Russian servicemen, which Russian servicemen are [trying](#) to [suppress](#). They also detain and kidnap journalists ([1](#), [2](#), [3](#)), [officials](#), [politicians](#), activists, and [local residents](#). A [list of people](#) known to have been abducted by the Russian occupation authorities is maintained by the ZMINA Human Rights Center.

By March 19, at least 902 civilians had been killed and 1,459 wounded in the fighting, [according to the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#), while the real figures should be "much higher" - in particular, data from places where hostilities are ongoing, including Mariupol, Volnovakha and Izyum, are being withheld. [According to the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine](#), 115 children were killed and another 140 were wounded.

Truth Hounds experts [conducted](#) a detailed investigation into the March 15 Russian attack on a maternity hospital in Mariupol.

More than 6.5 million residents of Ukraine were displaced from their homes and relocated to other locations within the country, an estimate contained in a [report](#) published by the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Another 3.2 million residents have left the country, so the total number of displaced persons is about a quarter of the country's population. It is noted that more than 12 million more people are unable to leave areas directly affected by the war due to increased security risks, destruction of roads, lack of resources or information on where to find a safe place. [According to UNICEF](#), more than 1.5 million children have become refugees.

**RUSSIA USES HYPERSONIC WEAPONS, UKRAINE RESOLUTELY REPELS AIR STRIKES**

The Russian Defense Ministry has [announced](#) that on March 18, the Russian armed forces used hypersonic weapons for the first time. It is claimed that they can hit targets at a range of more than two thousand kilometers, overcoming air and missile defense systems. Their use has also been confirmed by American officials, [according to CNN](#), without disclosing their sources. According to them, the purpose of the use could be as a test of this type of weapon in war conditions, and "sending a message to the West about the Russian capabilities." U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin [said](#) that Russia's use of hypersonic missiles would not play a significant role in the war against Ukraine.

At the same time, experts at the American Institute for the Study of War are [convinced](#) that Russia has failed in its attempts to attack major Ukrainian cities, according to their report. They predict that the war may come to a standstill when neither side will be able to conduct offensive operations capable of changing its course. The Institute's report also noted that the Russian army will try to bomb cities in order to break the resistance of the population, but experts do not consider this a possible outcome. The Intelligence Directorate of the British Armed Forces [stresses](#) that Ukraine has managed to defend its advantage over Russia in the airspace, thus disrupting one of Russia's key tasks. Western intelligence [estimates](#) that about 1,000 Russian servicemen are killed or wounded in Ukraine every day. Experts say the next two weeks of fighting will be decisive. Analysts from the Conflict Intelligence Team [note](#) that Russia continues to move troops and engineering equipment to Ukraine's borders, with a lower intensity of movement than in the months before the war began. According to analysts, Russia may have up to 40 more battalion-tactical groups with a total strength of over 20,000 people, but there are "legitimate questions" to the training and combat qualities of these units.

The General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine [warns](#) of a high probability that the Belarusian army will join the Russian forces and start a war against Ukraine on land. On March 19, the last employees of the Belarusian embassy [left](#) Ukraine. At the same time, the people of Belarus are trying to [counteract](#) the country's involvement in the war.

[According to Aleksei Arestovich](#), advisor to the head of the Ukrainian presidential office, by the evening of March 20, the front line had "practically frozen," because the warring parties currently lack the strength to reverse the situation in one direction or another, so they limit themselves to tactical actions.

Russian military expert Pavel Luzin [analyzes](#) the possibility of Russia using non-strategic nuclear weapons. He notes that the Kremlin's idea that nuclear blackmail can be used as a political tool, as well as the concept of "nuclear de-escalation" of the conflict, is a dangerous delusion that poses a threat to Russia itself. Former NATO Deputy Supreme Allied Commander General Richard Shireff has [stated](#) that Europe must be prepared for a possible nuclear attack.

CAMPS FOR PRISONERS OF WAR ESTABLISHED IN UKRAINE

On 19 March, Ukrainian Prosecutor-General Iryna Venediktova [said](#) that camps for Russian prisoners of war had been set up in Ukraine. A total of at least 562 Russian servicemen are in captivity, Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk [said](#), specifying that this is incomplete data. Ukraine has also set up the [National Information Bureau](#), which will collect and systematize information about Ukrainians killed, missing or captured, as well as about captive and dead Russian servicemen. It is [noted](#) that this will allow Ukraine to prove once again Russia's crimes, and in the future to activate the process of exchange of both prisoners and bodies of the dead. The National Information Bureau will be under the Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine. It is planned to exchange information with the Russian side through the structures of the International Committee of the Red Cross, which acts as a neutral intermediary. Iryna Vereshchuk [stressed](#) that the National Information Bureau will act in accordance with international humanitarian law. At the same time, the international human rights organization Human Rights Watch [stated](#) that the Ukrainian authorities should stop publishing videos of captured Russian soldiers, as it violates the Geneva Convention aimed at ensuring decent treatment of captured combatants from all sides.

Ukrainian Defence Minister Oleksiy Reznikov [said](#) that more and more often people from non-government-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions who had been forcibly mobilized and sent to war by the Russian authorities were surrendered to the Ukrainian military. He stressed that Russia does not count them among its total losses and uses them as "cannon fodder" and urged them to save their lives.

## AID TO UKRAINE AND NEW SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA

The European Union authorities are considering the possibility of using the assets of large Russian businessmen caught in the sanctions to finance the reconstruction of Ukraine, Bloomberg [reported](#), citing three sources familiar with the discussions. It is noted that the initiative is at a "very early stage" of discussions, the final decision has not yet been made. The use of frozen Russian assets to pay war reparations is also being considered as an option. European Council President Charles Michel [said](#) he supports the creation of a solidarity fund for Ukraine to provide basic services and meet the urgent needs of Ukrainian citizens.

EU governments will also consider imposing an [oil embargo](#) on Russia as part of the fifth package of sanctions. Poland [plans](#) to completely stop buying gas from Russia from 2023. President of the European Parliament Roberta Metsola [spoke](#) in favor of reducing Europe's dependence on Russian energy resources as soon as possible, since its purchase indirectly finances Russia's armed aggression. At the same time, the U.S. Senate may [reject](#) the ban on energy imports from Russia – the bill was approved by the House of Representatives (the lower house of the U.S. Congress) last week. Nevertheless, according to CNN, senators consider the initiative controversial. [Norway](#) joined the EU sanctions against Russia: this is the most extensive package of restrictions ever adopted in the country. The Norwegian

sanctions will affect Russia's financial, energy, transportation, technology and defense sectors as well as hundreds of Russians and organizations. Switzerland [plans to ban](#) exports of luxury goods to Russia. [Australia](#) and [Japan](#) have expanded sanctions against Russia. New Zealand announced the first package of sanctions - travel restrictions and a decision to freeze assets extended to Russian President Vladimir Putin and 12 members of the Russian Security Council. The restrictions also affected more than 300 politicians, military and propagandists, as well as 19 organizations. [Great Britain](#) and [Canada](#) revoked the broadcasting license of the Russian propaganda television channel RT. Northern Macedonia canceled visa-free travel for Russian citizens.

The European Parliament [banned](#) diplomats and officials from Russia and Belarus from entering its buildings in Brussels. Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki [advocates](#) a complete ban on EU trade with Russia.

The U.S. is [in talks](#) with Turkey to provide Ukraine with S-400 missile defense systems, previously purchased from Russia, in exchange for the removal of U.S. sanctions against Turkey. Reuters sources [said](#) Turkish authorities were unlikely to agree to the deal because they did not want to spoil relations with Moscow.

The Lithuanian Seimas [called](#) on the United Nations to establish a no-fly zone over Ukraine. The resolution also calls for humanitarian corridors for people in the occupied territory and combat zone, which can be organized through the UN mechanisms or through the efforts of the countries willing to do so. The deputies also urge their colleagues from other countries to work on new sanctions.

The French authorities have [blocked](#) the property and assets of the richest Russians totaling nearly 850 million euros because of the sanctions, while the amount of frozen assets of the Russian central bank in France was about 22 billion euros.

## PERSECUTION OF RUSSIANS AND UKRAINIANS IN RUSSIA

Citizens of Ukraine living in Moscow are [summoned](#) to the police, their cell phones are searched, and their apartments are searched. According to the human rights project OVD info, as of March 20, there were over 15,000 detentions at anti-war protests in Russia. A campaign of criminal prosecution of protesters and opposition activists has been launched. At least [37 cases were opened](#), and at least 43 people were prosecuted. At least 198 [administrative reports](#) were drawn up for anti-war statements. The United Russia party [drafted](#) amendments that would criminalize fakes about the work of Russian government agencies abroad.