HIGHLIGHTS

PULSE OF PEACE IN DONBAS

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RUSSIA DECLARES "REDUCTION IN HOSTILITIES", SHELLING CONTINUES

On March 28, Russian military forces again attacked Severodonetsk and other populated areas of Luhansk Region, killing at least two people and injuring ten. Sergei Gaidai, head of the Regional Military Administration, describes the situation in the Luhansk region, 70% of which is under occupation. On the same day there was a strike on an oil depot in the Rivne region, and shelling of many populated areas of the regions of Ukraine continued. "Hromadske" publishes a summary of the situation in the regions by the morning of March 30.

On March 29, a Russian shell hit the regional administration building in Mykolayiv. At least 15 people were killed. Among others, the infrastructure of the Khmelnytskyy, Rivne, and Dnipropetrovsk regions was shelled. The Ukrainian Armed Forces General Staff noted that the Russian shelling of fuel storage facilities was aimed at creating conditions for a humanitarian crisis.

On March 29, a representative of the Russian delegation to the negotiations, Vladimir Medinskiy, said that the Russian army would "drastically reduce combat operations" in the Kyiv and Chernihiv directions. The Russian Defence Ministry confirmed these plans. The Ukrainian Armed Forces General Staff stated that the Russian Armed Forces probably temporarily abandoned the blockade of Kyiv in order to regroup and concentrate on the offensive operation in eastern Ukraine, later confirming that Russia was partially withdrawing some of its units from the territory of Kyiv and Chernihiv regions. It is noted that the purpose of this may be to create a

misconception that the plan to encircle Kyiv has been abandoned. Civilian homes are being mined in the abandoned territories.

The British Defence Ministry believes that Russia's statements about the withdrawal of some units from the areas around Kyiv may indicate an acknowledgement of the loss of its initiative in the region. At the same time, British intelligence experts still expect fierce fighting near Kyiv. In addition, citing British intelligence data, it is reported that mercenaries of the Russian private military company Wagner are deploying their forces in eastern Ukraine, with their help the Kremlin expects to compensate for the failures suffered by the Russian armed forces.

Read about the situation in Kyiv here.

On March 30, an oil depot in Dnepr was destroyed. In spite of Russian Defense Ministry statements about "reducing hostilities," heavy shelling continued in the Chernihiv region.

The situation on the front as of the evening of March 30 is here.

LEGAL INNOVATIONS TO SUPPORT UKRAINIANS IN WAR CONDITIONS

The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine has worked out nine main directions of how the country will live, work, accumulate resources and defend itself in conditions of full-scale war – this was announced by the Prime Minister of Ukraine Denis Shmygal. We are talking about providing the defense forces with everything they need, food security issues, measures to restart the economy, the program of assistance to internally displaced persons and social assistance programs.

Ukraine has already paid 22.7 billion UAH for 3.5 million people within the framework of the program of financial aid "ePidtrimka" for private entrepreneurs and hired workers from the regions where active combat operations are going on. The deadline for applying for aid is March 31.

Ukraine developed the draft law № 7198, which will allow providing residents of the country with compensation for housing damaged and destroyed as a result of war. In particular, it provides for the provision of housing rather than cash payments. At the same time, a person will be able to choose the city where he or she wants to settle.

In addition, the Ukrainian government is preparing a program to support people who have been forcibly removed to Russia by Russian armed forces.

The Verkhovna Rada registered a draft law defining the procedure and consequences of banning pro-Russian parties. It envisages that if a party is banned by a court, its property, funds, and other assets will become the property of the state.

RUSSIA USES TERROR IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

Since the start of the full-scale war, Russian armed forces have kidnapped at least 13 heads of territorial communities from six regions of Ukraine. Kherson and Kharkov oblasts, as well as Zaporizhzhia and Kyiv oblasts, were the largest. According to the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry, the Russian occupiers kidnapped about

30 representatives of local authorities, activists, and journalists. The story of one of the activists who was tortured while in the custody of the Russian military can be found [here](). President Volodymyr Zelensky [stated]() that Russian occupiers killed some of the kidnapped mayors of Ukrainian cities.

NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN UKRAINE AND RUSSIA: THE KEY REQUIREMENT IS SECURITY GUARANTEES

On March 29, another round of talks between the Ukrainian and Russian delegations on the conditions of possible peace was held in Istanbul. The parties did not sign anything, but outlined the final proposals they worked on after the previous meetings. According to Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, the minimum program for the Ukrainian delegation was to find solutions to humanitarian problems, while the maximum program was to achieve a cease-fire and stable agreements.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan [urged]() the sides to agree on a cease-fire.

The Ukrainian delegation [conveyed]() to the Russian delegation its vision of an international document giving security guarantees for Ukraine. The key requirement is that Ukraine's security guarantees must be similar to Article 5 of NATO. That is, if someone attacks Ukraine, the guarantors should hold consultations within 3 days and provide necessary assistance: provide weapons, introduce troops, and close the sky.

Such a treaty could be a diplomatic option to end the war. In this case, the first step should be the withdrawal of troops, then a referendum by Ukraine on its individual clauses, and the ratification of the treaty by the security guarantors and Ukraine.

Among the guarantors Ukraine sees the countries of the UN Security Council, in particular: Great Britain, China, the USA, France, Turkey, Germany, Canada, Poland and Israel. David Arahamia, a member of the Ukrainian delegation, noted that Ukraine will propose to make free accession to the treaty at the request of other countries.

If the proposal is approved by the parties, Ukraine will fix its neutrality, non-aligned and non-nuclear, will not place foreign military bases on its territory and will not be able to join military and political unions, except the EU. A separate clause will concern Crimea - it is assumed that within 15 years negotiations on its status will be held with Russia, during this period both sides of the negotiations pledge not to use armed methods to resolve the situation. At the same time, the situation in Donbass will be discussed directly by the presidents of Ukraine and Russia.

Following the talks, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky [noted]() that the signals from the negotiation platform with Russia could be called positive, but urged to trust only concrete results and real actions. According to Zelenskyy, we should not let our guard down now, and the situation has not gotten any easier: although the negotiation process continues at different levels, the Russian army does not stop shelling, so the only effective guarantee of Ukraine's survival is the Ukrainian Armed Forces and all those involved in the country's defense. Volodymyr Zelensky stressed that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine must be guaranteed without

any compromises. Also, questions about the removal of sanctions against Russia cannot be raised now.

The representative of the Ukrainian delegation at the talks with Russia, Oleksandr Chalyy, explained that de facto Ukraine was seeking security guarantees from the West as for NATO countries.

REACTION OF RUSSIA AND POSSIBLE GUARANTORS

The head of the Russian delegation, Vladimir Medinsky, believes that Ukraine in Istanbul declared its readiness to fulfill Russia's "principal requirements," while he said nothing about the withdrawal of troops and made it clear that the Kremlin would not compromise on Crimea and Donbas. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov interpreted Ukraine's proposals at the Istanbul talks as an agreement on a "final solution" to the Crimea and Donbas issues, while the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry stressed that this understanding was erroneous.

British Deputy Prime Minister Dominic Raab noted that Britain would consider Ukraine's request to become a guarantor of its security, but ruled out taking on the obligations that NATO members have within the Alliance.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said his country was "generally" ready to act as a guarantor of Ukraine's security. German government spokesman Steffen Gebestreit said he did not want to speculate on whether the security guarantor role would also include a military component.

According to U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, there are no signs that negotiations between Ukraine and Russia are "moving forward in an effective way" because the United States has not seen "signs of genuine seriousness" from Russia. French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian has a similar position, saying that there has been no breakthrough in the talks between Russia and Ukraine and that Russian President Vladimir Putin "still wants to impose his dictate on Ukraine.

At the same time, an analytical commentary by Bloomberg noted that although Ukraine's neutrality could become the basis for a peace treaty with Russia, it is currently unacceptable to either side.

RUSSIA TRIES TO USE GAS BLACKMAIL

Russian President Vladimir Putin has announced that gas supplies to "unfriendly" countries will be billed only in rubles. The press secretary of the Russian president, Dmitry Peskov, noted that if he refused to pay for supplies in rubles, they would be terminated. At the same time, Josep Borrel, head of the European Union diplomacy, does not consider the scenario that Russian President Vladimir Putin would stop oil and gas supplies to blackmail Europe, demanding the easing of tough sanctions, realistic.

The G7 countries have agreed on a joint rejection of Russia's demand to pay for gas exports in rubles, German Economy and Climate Protection Minister Robert Habek

said. The G7 ministers agreed that such a demand is a "unilateral and obvious violation of existing contracts". The decision applies to all EU countries.

Evropeyskaya Pravda analyzes the possible consequences of Russia's gas ultimatum.

At the same time, the European Union is close to imposing sanctions against oil and coal from Russia, but has not yet reached a common opinion on gas, Finnish Minister for European Affairs and Corporate Governance Titti Tuppurainen said.

On March 30, the German government said it had received assurances from Russia that Europe would not have to pay for Russian gas supplies in rubles, and nothing would change for EU partners, but how this mechanism would work is unclear.

WESTERN COUNTRIES CONTINUE TO STRENGTHEN SANCTIONS

On March 29, the leaders of Britain, the U.S., France, Germany and Italy spoke against any easing of sanctions against Russia. At the same time, the positions of the EU and the UK on the coordination of anti-Russian sanctions are different.

The European Commission is preparing new sanctions against Russia due to the Kremlin's position on the transition to the gas payments in rubles, Reuters reported, citing its sources in the European Commission.

In addition, European countries are considering expanding restrictions to more banks, imposing sanctions on additional family members of oligarchs and increasing restrictions on the use of cryptocurrencies to evade sanctions.

The UK passed a new law banning the maintenance of aircraft or ships belonging to specific Russian oligarchs under sanctions or their companies.

The European Commission called on EU member states to eliminate citizenship programs in exchange for investments and to assess the possibility of revoking the citizenship of Russians and Belarusians hit by sanctions because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The UK government called on all state organizations in the country to review their cooperation with Russian companies and, if possible, to terminate procurement agreements.

Poland will ban coal imports from Russia because of the war in Ukraine; the government has already drafted a bill to this effect.

Luxembourg frozen Russian assets worth 2.5 billion euros.

A number of options for additional sanctions against Russia are also being considered by the U.S. – this was announced by the White House Communications Director Kate Bedingfield. She stressed that there are many possible options, "including extending sanctions with the emergence of new targets or tightening existing sanctions. Among them, the U.S. intends to limit Russia's ability to buy parts for military needs abroad. The U.S. Senate has introduced a bill to repurpose funds from seized Russian assets into a fund to help Ukrainian refugees and rebuild Ukraine, and the country plans to provide $500 million in direct budget aid to Ukraine.

EU APPROVES 10-POINT PLAN TO SUPPORT UKRAINIAN REFUGEES, THEIR NUMBER REACHES 4 MILLION

The Council of the European Union has approved a 10-point plan to support Ukrainians who are forced to leave the country. In particular, it is planned to create a platform for the exchange of information on the registration of all those arriving and applying for temporary protection. Another item involves the development of national contingency plans to meet medium- and long-term needs. Also touched on is the topic of accepting children, including those arriving unaccompanied on EU territory. According to the UN as of March 29, more than 4 million Ukrainians have become refugees since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion, having been forced to leave the country, more than 2.3 million have left for Poland.

SUPPORT FOR PUTIN AMONG RUSSIANS GROWS

According to the Russian sociological agency Levada-Center, the support of Russians for the actions of Russian President Vladimir Putin increased to 83% in March. This represents an increase of over ten percentage points over the support figures for February and January. The Levada Center sociologists recorded support for Putin at 69% and 71% in January and February, respectively.