

## HIGHLIGHTS

# PULSE OF PEACE IN DONBAS



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### SHELLING OF REGIONS CONTINUES, BATTLE IN DONBAS IS BEGINNING

As of the morning of April 19, the Ukrainian Armed Forces General Staff [notes](#) that Russia has intensified attacks along the entire front line in Donbas and is not stopping missile and bomb strikes on critical infrastructure in Ukraine. In particular, the occupiers are expected to continue fighting in an attempt to reach the administrative boundaries of the Kherson region.

Russia is building up its military aviation forces at the Lipetsk-2 airfield in the Lipetsk region, [according to Project Schemes](#). From this airfield, the Russian army is attacking Ukrainian cities to the east. Satellite images show that the number of fighters and bombers at the airfield has doubled compared to March. Due to significant losses, the Russian Armed Forces have significantly [reduced](#) their activity in Ukrainian airspace and are striking remotely: with ballistic and cruise missiles.

As a result of the shelling of residential areas and infrastructure in the city of Mykolaiv and the region [on April 16](#) alone, 39 people were injured.

In Kharkiv region, the Ukrainian armed forces carried out a number of successful operations, [pushing](#) the Russian occupants further away from the regional center. At the same time, fighting and shelling continue, with at least five people killed and 20 wounded in a [strike](#) in Kharkiv on April 17.

On April 18, five targeted rocket [attacks](#) on [Lviv](#) killed at least seven people and [wounded](#) 11 others. A child was among the injured. Missile strikes were also carried out in the [Dnipropetrovsk](#) region. On the same day, Russian troops entered Kreminna, Luhansk region. The head of the Luhansk regional military administration,

Sergei Gaidai, [notes](#) that Kreminna, along with Popasna, are the hottest spots in the region. It is impossible to count the number of people left in the city, where fighting is continuing. There are currently no evacuations from this settlement, but authorities will [try to evacuate](#) people from Severodonetsk, Rubizhne, Lysychansk, Popasna, Gorsky and Nizhny – they urge people to leave as they are still able. Hromadske [reports](#) on the situation in Severodonetsk, which has been shelled chaotically since the start of the war.

[According to Kirill Budanov](#), head of the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Ukrainian Defense Ministry, the Russian armed forces intend to achieve at least some kind of victory in the decisive battle for Donbas by Easter, that is, on April 24. On April 18, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky [stated](#) that Russian occupation troops have begun the battle for Donbas - a significant part of the entire Russian army is now concentrated for this offensive. The Ukrainian Armed Forces General Staff also [reported](#) that signs of the beginning of an offensive operation were being recorded, with Russian armed forces attempting to break through the Ukrainian defense almost along the entire front line in Donetsk, Kharkiv, and Luhansk regions.

## RUSSIA'S ACTIONS IN UKRAINE CALLED GENOCIDE

US President Joe Biden [called](#) Russia's actions in Ukraine genocide for the first time, later adding that "it is becoming clearer and clearer that Putin is simply trying to wipe out even the idea of being Ukrainian" - earlier his assistants argued that the situation cannot yet be characterized by that term. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky [thanked](#) him for his position, noting that "calling things by their proper names is important to confront evil," also noting that Ukraine was grateful for the aid already provided by the United States and needed more heavy weaponry to prevent further crimes by Russia. The position of the US President was [supported](#) by the Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau, as well as by the President of Colombia, [Ivan Duque](#).

At the same time, French President Emmanuel Macron [calls](#) Russians and Ukrainians "brotherly nations," repeating the narrative of Russian propaganda, and believes that it is inappropriate to call the actions of Russians in Ukraine genocide. However, he stresses that Russia has unilaterally started a brutal war where war crimes are being committed that require investigation. The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry [said](#) it was disappointed by Macron's unwillingness to acknowledge genocide after all the blatant statements by the Russian leadership and the criminal actions of the Russian military. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz also [spoke out](#) about war crimes in Ukraine, but refrained from mentioning genocide.

## SITUATION IN MARIUPOL: UKRAINIAN ARMED FORCES REFUSE TO SURRENDER

On 13 April in Mariupol, units of the 36th Marine Brigade, previously blockaded, joined with other units of the Ukrainian Armed Forces as a result of a maneuver, [reinforcing](#) the defense area.

Mariupol continues to be under siege. Civilians cannot leave the city due to the actions of the Russian army – shelling does not stop even after agreements on humanitarian corridors, some local residents are taken to the territory of the so-called "DPR" or Russia. There, they are sent to so-called "[filtration camps](#)".

On the night of April 17, the occupiers offered the Ukrainian fighters defending the Azovstal plant in Mariupol to surrender, promising a ceasefire in return, but they [refused](#) to surrender. The Russian armed forces are constantly [shelling](#) the plant, including with [super-heavy aerial bombs](#). Civilians are hiding on its territory, Mikhail Vershinin, head of the city's patrol police, [said](#). President Volodymyr Zelensky [assured](#) that everything possible was being done to save the residents of Mariupol. [According to the president](#), if the Ukrainian military in Mariupol is destroyed, any negotiations with Russia will be impossible.

The Main Intelligence Directorate of the Ukrainian Defense Ministry [reported](#) that the Russian armed forces deployed 13 mobile crematoriums in the city to eliminate the bodies of dead civilians, which are evidence of war crimes committed by Russia, as well as trying to identify and eliminate witnesses to them. Pyotr Andryushchenko, adviser to the mayor of Mariupol, [states](#) that former Mariupol City Council deputy Konstantin Ivashchenko, whom the occupants appointed "mayor of the city," received an order from the Russian armed forces to clear the city center of rubble and bodies of the dead for the occupants' May 9 parade there. Officials of the Mariupol city council [described](#) how the actions of the Russian armed forces created a humanitarian disaster in the city. From the very beginning, they countered the evacuation of the population, destroying food supplies, utilities and equipment, the power and water supply system, and communications. It is noted that volunteers and the authorities acted together from the early days of the war: they collected humanitarian aid and distributed it, conducted burials of the dead. At the same time, the occupants constantly opened fire on city workers and volunteers, and residential areas were randomly shelled. The Verkhovna Rada Commissioner for Human Rights, Lyudmila Denisova, citing UN data, [reported](#) that about 100,000 civilians remaining in the city suffer from a shortage of water and food, and the occupiers have not allowed a single humanitarian convoy with food and medicine from Ukraine or international organizations into the city for a month of the blockade. The UN World Food Program has [called](#) on it to provide access to people in surrounded Ukrainian cities, including Mariupol, as they are running out of their last supplies of food and water.

Mariupol Mayor Vadim Boychenko [told](#) the Associated Press that more than 10,000 residents have died in the city since the invasion began. He appealed to the global community of investigative journalists and satellite operators to join the process of documenting Russia's crimes. An interview about the situation in the city is [here](#). Hromadske [tells](#) the story of one Mariupol family.

## FROZEN RUSSIAN ASSETS CAN BE USED TO REBUILD UKRAINE

The European Union has [closed](#) a loophole that allowed European countries to export weapons to Russia for tens of millions of euros - the arms export ban was imposed back in July 2014, but the sanctions had a clause that allowed sales under contracts signed before August 2014. According to Reuters, it was removed as part of the fifth sanctions package at the request of the governments of some countries, particularly Poland and Lithuania.

The European Police Office (Europol) has [launched](#) a search for criminal assets belonging to people and companies sanctioned in connection with the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Britain has put 206 more Russian individuals and companies on its sanctions list and has [banned](#) imports of Russian cast iron and steel, as well as exports of quantum technologies and advanced materials since April 14. The country has also [frozen](#) \$10 billion from two business partners of Russian billionaire Roman Abramovich, a record amount.

The U.S. is [considering](#) a bill that could allow frozen funds from Russia to be transferred to Ukraine. The bill provides that Ukraine can sue Russia in the U.S. for the destruction of a certain facility and demand monetary compensation from the seized assets. Current U.S. law does not normally consider suing a foreign government for actions occurring outside the United States, but the introduced bill could change that. The country says it has [no plans](#) to return assets frozen under sanctions for Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine to Russian oligarchs.

The next package of European Union sanctions against Russia will concern Russia's largest bank, Sberbank, and oil supplies, the head of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, [said](#). According to her, the EU fears an immediate embargo on Russian oil, as it could lead to a sharp increase in its prices, and hence the growth of Russia's income. Ursula von der Leyen also noted that she believes Russia's bankruptcy is only a matter of time, and called for Ukraine to be provided with arms as soon as possible so that it can end this war. At the same time, major global trading houses plan to [reduce](#) oil purchases by Russian state-owned companies as of May 15 so as not to violate European Union sanctions. The embargo on Russian coal imports was [imposed](#) by Poland – the country did it on its own, without waiting for other EU member states to decide.

Another package of sanctions against Russia over its invasion of Ukraine was imposed by [Australia](#) – in particular, Gazprom and Transneft are on the sanctions list.

On April 17, an EU directive [banning](#) ships affiliated with Russia from entering ports became effective in all European Union member states that have sea or river ports. Five (of 27) countries of the European Union [closed](#) their ports for Russian ships ahead of schedule: Italy, Belgium, Estonia, Bulgaria and Romania.

Oleksandr Repkin, Special Representative of the Ukrainian Foreign Minister for Economic Diplomacy, [explains](#) how economic diplomacy helps Ukraine win the war with Russia.

## RUSSIA ACCUSES UKRAINE OF "SHELLING BORDER TERRITORIES," THREATENING TO STRIKE DECISION-MAKING CENTERS

Russia continues to resort to a strategy of provocations. Over the past few days, it has repeatedly tried to accuse the Ukrainian armed forces of allegedly shelling border territories. On April 13, the governor of Russia's [Kursk](#) Region stated this, and on April 14, the authorities of the [Bryansk](#) and [Belgorod](#) Regions stated this. The Russian Investigative Committee also [stated](#) that the Ukrainian armed forces invaded Russian airspace using two attack helicopters with heavy offensive weapons and carried out "at least six airstrikes on residential buildings". The State Border Service of Ukraine [stressed](#) that Russia's statements about the shelling of border regions were a fake, spread in order to discredit Ukraine, justify its criminal actions, and increase public support for military actions. The day before, the Russian Defense Ministry [threatened](#) to strike decision-making centers, including those in Kyiv, if Ukraine does not stop "committing acts of sabotage and strikes against facilities on Russian territory. [According to the Main Directorate of Intelligence of the Ukrainian Defense Ministry](#), the Russian special services are planning a number of terrorist attacks in their country, including possible missile and bomb strikes on cities in order to blame Ukraine for this. It is stressed that Russia will resort to such steps due to the unsatisfactory implementation of the mobilization plan: attacks on Russian territory will help to consolidate the country's residents more strongly. Also due to the lack of human resources, Russian troops are trying to involve local residents of their temporarily occupied territories in the war: for example, in the city of [Izium](#), Kharkiv Region, they have begun the forced mobilization of men, and similar information is coming from the Kherson Region. There are [reports](#) of plans by the Russian armed forces to close Mariupol to entry and exit and prohibit movement in the areas starting on April 18 in order to filter all men, some of whom are going to be mobilized.

## RUSSIAN BLACK SEA FLEET FLAGSHIP MOSKVA CRUISER SUNK BY UKRAINIAN ARMED FORCES, RUSSIA CLAIMS STORM IS TO BLAME

On April 13, the Ukrainian armed forces [hit](#) the Russian missile cruiser Moskva with [Neptun](#) missiles, causing serious damage and sinking it. This particular cruiser had earlier delivered an ultimatum demanding surrender to the Ukrainian border guards on the island of Zmein and received a historical refusal. The Russian Defense Ministry [said](#) that the cruiser caught [fire](#) for an unknown reason, which caused the detonation of ammunition, and the ship sank while being towed in stormy conditions. On April 14, Pentagon spokesman John Kirby [noted](#) that there was indeed an explosion on the ship, but what caused it is unknown. The cruiser was hit by a Ukrainian anti-ship missile, The Washington Post [confirmed](#), citing a senior U.S. government source.

It was also [claimed](#) that the ship's crew had been evacuated. The Russian Defense Ministry did not specify whether there were any casualties or fatalities as a result of

the incident. Advisor of the head of the Office of the President Alexei Arestovich [said](#) that the cruiser had 510 crew members, the same number stated in the characteristics of the ship in [open sources](#). On April 16, the Defense Ministry [published](#) a video of the meeting of the Navy Commander with the sailors of the cruiser. The part of the video, where the number of the crew might have been announced, came out without sound. [According to Radio Liberty](#), at least one sailor from the sunken cruiser was killed and there were a number of media [reports](#) about other dead and missing sailors. The "Novaya Gazeta. Europe" [stated](#) about at least 40 deaths. [According to Navy expert H. I. Sutton](#), half of the crew of the Russian cruiser were killed or wounded.

[It is noted](#) that the loss of the cruiser Moscow could seriously weaken the defense of the Russian fleet, involved in the war with Ukraine, against air attacks. Forbes [called](#) this cruiser the most expensive military loss of Russia in the war against Ukraine.

#### THE FOURTH AND FIFTH HOSTAGE EXCHANGE TOOK PLACE

On April 19, the fifth exchange of detainees took place. The Ukrainian side exchanged 76 people: 60 military servicemen, of whom 10 were officers, and 16 civilians, said Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk.

Before that, on April 14, there was the fourth exchange of detainees between Russia and Ukraine. Thirty people [returned](#) to Ukraine: 5 officers and 17 enlisted personnel, as well as 8 civilians. As of April 11, Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk [told](#) Reuters in a commentary that about 1,700 Ukrainian servicemen and civilians, including 500 women, were being held by Russian troops and militants under Russian control. She also [added](#) that Ukraine and Russia maintain parity in the number of prisoners of war: each side has about 700 of them, and noted that Ukraine will not exchange military for civilians, as it is prohibited by the Geneva Convention: "We demand that our civilians be released without any conditions".

In addition, Ukrainian intelligence officers [managed to secure](#) the release of two Ukrainian pilots. They [said](#) that Ukrainian servicemen held in Russian pre-trial detention facilities did not have access to proper medical care and were subjected to cruel treatment. Ukraine is also negotiating the release from captivity of 169 national guards captured by the occupiers during the attack on the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, the Ukrainian Interior Minister Denys Monastyrskyy [said](#). Civil society organizations are also involved in collecting information about prisoners and illegally detained civilians: for example, the Euromaidan SOS initiative distributes a [data collection form](#) and, together with other organizations, prepares the first [complaints](#) about the illegal detention of activists in Russian-occupied territories for submission to the ECHR and UN.

#### UKRAINE PASSES LAWS BANNING RUSSIAN SYMBOLS, RUSSIAN INVASION RECOGNIZED AS GENOCIDE

On 14 April, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine [passed](#) a bill banning symbols used by the Russian army. [According to the document](#), the letters Z and V, symbols of the Russian armed forces, any propaganda of the Russian regime and "military special operations" in Ukraine fall under the ban. It is allowed to show the symbols in works and materials "created to condemn the Russian regime" and media materials that do not justify Russia's actions. In addition, a [resolution](#) was [passed](#) recognizing the Russian invasion of Ukraine as genocide. It is stated that acts of genocide in Russia's actions are manifested, in particular, in the commission by the Russian Armed Forces in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine of numerous murders, abductions, imprisonment, torture, rape; systematic premeditated murder of civilians and creation by Russian military of such living conditions that aim at their complete or partial destruction, in particular through blockade of settlements, prevention of humanitarian aid and obstacles to evacuation of civilians, the seizure and deliberate destruction of infrastructure; the forced transfer of Ukrainian children to the territory of the Russian Federation and their transfer to a foreign environment in order to destroy their identity as Ukrainians, as well as the deportation of thousands of people to Russia; widespread violence against the Ukrainian population, representatives of Ukrainian state authorities and local authorities, representatives of public organizations and other local activists, journalists, clergymen and other authoritative figures in Ukrainian society, as well as in systematic actions aimed at creating conditions designed to gradually destroy the Ukrainian people through undermining economic potential and security.

On what grounds Russia's actions should be interpreted exactly as genocide, and what this would mean, is explained in an [article](#) by "European Truth".

## GLOBAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE WAR

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy [said](#) that according to the Ukrainian authorities, since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, 2.5 to 3 thousand Ukrainian servicemen have been killed, and 19,000 to 20,000 Russian servicemen. About 10 thousand more Ukrainian servicemen, according to the president, were wounded. As for civilian casualties, Zelensky noted that it is more difficult to count them because many are in the temporarily occupied territories. The Russian Defense Ministry has not published any information about military casualties in recent weeks.

U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres [presented](#) a detailed policy brief on the food, energy and financial crisis that may be caused by the war that Russia has unleashed.

Experts estimate that the war in Ukraine could lead to poverty, destitution and hunger for 1.7 billion people - more than one-fifth of the world's population.

Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund Kristalina Georgieva [said](#) that global economic growth in 2022-2023 will decline even more than predicted a few months ago. The main reason is the war in Ukraine. As a result, the IMF predicts a

further decline in global economic growth for both 2022 and 2023. In general, the decline in economic growth this year will affect 143 countries, which represent 86% of global GDP.