

HIGHLIGHTS

RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR CHRONICLES

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RUSSIA ANNOUNCES PARTIAL MOBILISATION AND PASSES A DRAFT LAW TOUGHENING PUNISHMENTS FOR REFUSING TO PARTICIPATE IN THE WAR AND SURRENDERING

On September 21, Russian President Vladimir Putin [announced](#) a partial mobilisation. However, the relevant [decree](#) did not define any territorial or categorical parameters for the partial mobilisation. In his address, he also supported the “referendums” on joining Russia announced in the L/DPR and in the occupied parts of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts, and also declared his readiness to use nuclear weapons to “protect the territorial integrity of Russia.” The day before, the Russian State Duma [introduced](#) the concepts of “mobilisation” and “wartime” into the Criminal Code and passed a draft law on punishment for desertion during mobilisation or wartime. Among other things, the Duma [toughened](#) punishments for failure to obey military orders, being absent without official leave, desertion and voluntary surrender into captivity. The amendments stress that reserve servicemen called up for military service will be criminally liable for non-appearance or desertion in the same way as contract service personnel and conscripts. The amendments also provide for up to 3 years in prison for refusing to take part in combat operations. The Federation Council may consider the amendments on September 21. Meduza [have gathered](#) the initial reactions of politicians, political analysts and journalists to the amendments.

REFERENDUMS ON JOINING RUSSIA ANNOUNCED IN UKRAINE’S OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

Against the backdrop of a counteroffensive by the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU), Russia [has intensified](#) its preparations for “referendums” in its occupied territories. On September 19, the “public chambers” of the L/DPR, and on September 20, the “public” of the

Russian-occupied parts of Kherson Oblast and Zaporizhzhia Oblast, demanded the immediate initiation of the referendums. On the same day, the media [reported](#) that attempts to hold a “referendum” were planned for 23-27 September. Earlier, Russia had planned to hold a pseudo-referendum on “joining Russia” in the occupied Kharkiv Oblast in early November. This [was reported](#) by the Donbas Realii project, citing a document obtained from intelligence sources. According to the document, 75% (100,000 people) would have “voted” in favour of joining Russia. The authors of the “strategy” suggested that during campaigning they should support the proposition that the annexation of the entire Kharkiv region to Russia was “inevitable”.

The Speaker of the State Duma, Vyacheslav Volodin, [said](#) that Russia supported the “referendums,” while the deputy head of the Russian Security Council, Dmitriy Medvedev, [said](#) that the referendums were necessary because this would allow the continuation of hostilities to be seen as an attack on Russia. The deputy head of the Ukrainian Presidential Office, Mykhailo Podolyak, [said](#) that these attempts were a sham, while the head of the Ukrainian Presidential Office, Andrii Yermak, [stressed](#) that Russia was only using these statements for the purposes of blackmail.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg [said](#) that NATO would consider the forthcoming “referendums” illegitimate. Officials from [Germany](#), [Latvia](#), [Estonia](#) and other countries also condemned Russia’s actions.

MASS GRAVES DISCOVERED IN UKRAINE’S DE-OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

By September 14, as part of the AFU’s counteroffensive, around 8500 square kilometres, 388 settlements and 150,000 people in Kharkiv Oblast had been [liberated](#). These figures are rising as the de-occupation process continues. At present, around [6%](#) of the region’s territory remains under the temporary control of the Russian armed forces. Prior to the counteroffensive, 32% of Kharkiv Oblast was occupied. Hromadske [has collected](#) comments from military experts on the reasons for the success of the counteroffensive.

Most residential buildings and infrastructure in the liberated territories have been destroyed and mass graves have been discovered. Work is underway in the region to restore power lines, mobile communications and medical facilities.

A photo reportage from Izyum, the largest city liberated during the offensive, can be found [here](#). Balakliya was the town from which the counter-offensive in Kharkiv Oblast began, a photo reportage from there is [here](#).

There will also be [evacuations](#) from the de-occupied territories of Kharkiv Oblast. A [total of 82,000 people](#) have been evacuated to safe regions during the mandatory evacuation.

AFU PREPARE TO CONTINUE COUNTEROFFENSIVE

In Luhansk Oblast, the AFU have taken control of [Bilohorivka](#), while in the south of Ukraine, units of the Russian armed forces are [pinned](#) between the AFU and the right bank. The Institute for the Study of War [notes](#) that Russian troops are trying to retreat in the western part of Kherson Oblast in a purposeful and organized manner in order to avoid a chaotic

retreat, as was the case in Kharkiv Oblast. According to analysts, the AFU is very likely to liberate a significant part or the entire western part of Kherson Oblast in the coming weeks. Radio Svoboda [has published](#) military analysts' opinions on Russia's further actions. The General Staff of the AFU's summary of the situation on the front as of the evening of September 20 can be found [here](#).

[According to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy](#), "a certain lull" after the AFU's rapid counteroffensive is a preparation for the next operations.

In addition to the liberation of territories, the counteroffensive operation made it possible to [capture](#) hundreds of Russian service personnel for subsequent exchange for prisoners of war held in Russia. In particular, [50 service women from the Azov regiment](#), which was defending the Azovstal plant, are being held captive, and at least one of them is pregnant. Human rights activists [have pointed out](#) that the exact number of women held captive by Russia is unknown.

AID TO UKRAINE AND SANCTIONS PRESSURE ON RUSSIA CONTINUE

US President Joe Biden [has announced](#) a new \$600 million military aid package for Ukraine. It [includes](#) ammunition for HIMARS systems, artillery rounds, anti-drone systems, demining equipment, etc.

[Slovenia](#) will transfer 28 tanks to Ukraine and [Greece](#) will transfer 40 infantry fighting vehicles. The German government [has announced](#) deliveries of Dingo armoured vehicles to Ukraine.

Germany will also transfer two Mars II multiple rocket launchers and their missiles.

The training of Ukrainian servicemen in [the UK](#) continues, with around 5,000 people already trained.

The European Parliament [has approved](#) 5 billion euros of macro-financial assistance for Ukraine to cover urgent needs due to the invasion, as well as Ukraine's repayment of financial obligations, including public debt.

The European Investment Bank [has sent](#) Ukraine the first €500 million of a €1.59 billion loan, which will provide urgent repairs to roads, bridges and railway infrastructure.

Sanctions pressure on Russia also continues. The EU [has extended for six months](#) the sanctions against 1,206 individuals and 108 legal entities from Russia, which have fallen under restrictions because of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Thus, the sanctions remain in force until 15 March 2023. [The EU is also planning](#) to discuss abolishing the unanimity principle when imposing sanctions - at the moment any country of the bloc can veto them. And the US has [imposed sanctions](#) against Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov and his relatives and a number of other officials and organisations. The amount of direct financial losses incurred by Russia alone due to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and sanctions is in the hundreds of billions of dollars, according to an internal Russian Finance Ministry document seen by [Bloomberg](#).

HALF OF UKRAINE'S 2023 BUDGET TO BE SPENT ON SECURITY AND DEFENCE

On September 13, the Ukrainian Cabinet of Ministers approved a draft state budget for 2023. Around 50 percent, over 1.1 trillion hryvnias, [will be spent](#) on the security and defence sector. Compared to the 2022 budget, the expenditure on security and defence in 2023 will increase more than fourfold. The second priority for the new state budget will be social programmes. It is assumed that the IMF, the European Union and the USA are to give Ukraine \$12 billion in assistance each. In addition, the budget envisages the creation of a fund to deal with the consequences of Russian aggression, in which it is planned to accumulate at least 19 billion hryvnia from confiscated Russian funds, as well as international aid. The [BBC](#) has published an analysis of the draft budget.

PROPOSALS ON SECURITY GUARANTEES FOR UKRAINE

Ukraine [has presented](#) recommendations on security guarantees developed by a group of experts led by the head of the Ukrainian presidential office, Andrii Yermak, and former NATO secretary-general Anders Fogh Rasmussen.

The recommendations call for the creation of a Kyiv security pact, which should bring together Ukraine and guarantor states. A core group of allies is expected to commit to supporting the AFU, while a broader group would provide non-military guarantees built around sanctions mechanisms. The guarantees should not replace Ukraine's aspirations to join NATO or become a member of the EU. The full text of the recommendations is [here](#).

RUSSIA SHELLS SECOND UKRAINIAN NUCLEAR POWER PLANT

On September 19, the Russian armed forces [shelled](#) the industrial zone of the South Ukraine Nuclear Power Plant (Mykolaiv Oblast). The shockwave damaged the building of the nuclear power plant, but its power units continue to operate normally. This is the second Ukrainian nuclear power plant to come under fire from Russia. The head of the Ukrainian Presidential office, Andriy Yermak, [called](#) the shelling nuclear blackmail and for Russia to be recognized as a state sponsor of terrorism.

A few days earlier, the board of governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) [adopted](#) a resolution demanding Russia end its occupation of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant.

DEBUNKING FAKES

After the successful counteroffensive by the AFU in Kharkiv Oblast, propaganda media outlets ([1](#), [2](#)) started spreading disinformation about "provocations" prepared by the Armed Forces of Ukraine in the de-occupied territories. In particular, they claim that the Ukrainian army was "preparing a new bloody provocation" in the town of Izyum.

These claims are fake.

Izyum is one of the major cities to be liberated in the region. [According to Izyum city councillor Maksim Strelnik](#), 80% of Izyum's infrastructure was destroyed by Russian

shelling. Already in the first days of the city's de-occupation, he [said](#) that according to preliminary data, about a thousand people had been victims of the Russian military aggression in Izyum. During the de-occupation of the region, [including near Izyum](#), mass graves containing [over 450 bodies](#) of both AFU soldiers and civilians [were discovered](#). Most of the graves were marked only with numbers and [exhumation](#) has begun. Experts have observed [evidence of torture](#) and signs of violent death in some of the dead.

On the territory of Kharkiv Oblast - including in [Kupiansk](#) and [Kozacha Lopan](#) – Russian armed forces [created](#) numerous places of illegal detention, de facto prisons. [Minors](#) and [foreign nationals](#) were also imprisoned and tortured. Experts from the American Institute for the Study of War (ISW) analysing the situation in Kharkiv Oblast [said](#) that the mass graves and Russian torture chambers showed that Russia was committing war crimes in all occupied Ukrainian territories.

The United States, the European Union and a number of European countries have reacted to the revelations of the mass graves. For example, the US State Secretary Anthony Blinken [gave assurances](#) that the US would support Ukraine in finding those responsible for these crimes, while the High Representative of the European Union, Josep Borell, [called](#) for not only the direct perpetrators to be brought to justice, but also the Russian leadership. Russia's statements about some "provocations prepared by Ukraine" in the de-occupied settlements in Kharkiv Oblast are a fabrication, designed to conceal the facts of war crimes, which are common practice among the Russian army in the occupied Ukrainian territories.