

Russia's attack on Ukraine: day 43

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According to the General Staff, the Armed Forces of Ukraine are inflicting losses on the enemy and gradually pushing them out of the occupied territories. The local military-civil administration reported the complete liberation of the Sumy Oblast. According to the Operational Command 'East', six enemy attacks were repulsed in the Kharkiv Oblast, and the actions taken by the enemy were unsuccessful. Russian units pressed on six localities in the Donbas and failed everywhere. The Land Forces Command of the Ukrainian army reported that it destroyed subunits of the 38th Mechanised Brigade of the Eastern Military District.

Defence Minister Oleksiy Reznikov said that Ukraine had won the first stage of the war. He stated that this was possible to a large extent thanks to armaments from Western partners. In the current phase of the conflict, in which the aggressor has moved to non-contact actions, the Ukrainian army does not need significant supplies of post-Soviet weapons, which are over 30 years old and lack sufficient ammunition. In Reznikov's opinion, the country should receive Western armaments (including 155 mm calibre artillery), which the soldiers can quickly master.

In all the oblasts in the south and east of Ukraine where fighting is taking place, invaders have bombed and shelled civilian targets, adding to the humanitarian catastrophe. A rocket attack on a railway station in Kramatorsk killed about 30 people and wounded more than 100. As a result of the Russian strikes, evacuation trains from Sloviansk and Kramatorsk were blocked for several hours, and infrastructure in Odesa and Novohrad-Volynskiy was also affected.

The mayor of Dnipro, Boris Filatov, recommended that those who had left the city not return yet, and also called on certain groups of residents (including women and children, the elderly and disabled) to evacuate. The appeal was criticised by the media, which pointed out that announcing an evacuation is solely the prerogative of the government administration.

There will be no spring army conscription in Ukraine in 2022. The General Staff recalled that in connection with military aggression and in order to ensure state defence, a state of general mobilisation was introduced on 24 February. Secretary of the National Security and Defence Council Oleksiy Danilov notified that all men who left the country without permission would have to explain why and on the basis of which documents, had been allowed them to avoid the mobilization obligation.

On 7 April, 4,676 people were evacuated, including 1,205 from Mariupol and 2,050 from the Zaporizhzhia Oblast. Ten humanitarian corridors – from the cities of Donetsk Oblast to Zaporizhzhia and from the areas of Luhansk Oblast to Bakhmut – are scheduled to be

launched on 8 April. Ukrainians who want to take part in the removal of the consequences of hostilities and help the population can join volunteer civil defence groups. Members of these formations will dismantle redundant barricades, provide assistance to victims of aggression and unload humanitarian supplies.

The bodies of 320 civilians have been found in Bucha since 6 April, and the number is growing every day. Forensic experts have reported that the cause of death for almost 90% of these people was gunshot wounds and not shrapnel from rocket or artillery shells. The German Federal Intelligence Service (BND) has revealed intercepted radio communications between the Russian military about the situation in the city, which confirms that the killings were premeditated. The Security Service of Ukraine is collecting evidence and establishing the identity of Russians and local collaborators responsible for the crimes in the Kyiv Oblast. It has already interviewed almost 2 000 witnesses and identified 33 collaborators. Fifteen people who plundered property left behind have also been detained. Over the past two days, 16 Russian sabotage and reconnaissance groups have been detected in Kyiv. Their members are said to be recruited mainly from the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts.

Belarusian state television has reported that railway lines have become the target of sabotage attacks. The Interior Ministry there said that more than 80 acts of 'terrorism and sabotage' had been reported on the railways over the past few weeks. In Belarus, Russian soldiers who have withdrawn from northern Ukraine have been observed travelling in stolen private cars (they had number plates torn off and were marked with the letter 'V').

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that Ukraine had allegedly 'departed from the proposals' discussed at talks in Istanbul on 29 March. According to him, the other side handed over to the negotiating group a draft agreement cancelling the previous arrangements. In response, Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolak recalled that the formula of international security guarantees is crucial for Kyiv. Experts are currently working on the accuracy and consistency of the wording of the draft document. The Kremlin spokesman admitted in an interview with Sky News that Russia had suffered 'significant losses' in the war, but did not give exact figures. He also said he hoped for an end to the conflict in the coming days or 'in the near future' due to Moscow achieving its military objectives or as a result of negotiations with Kyiv. The Russians have not reported their own losses for more than two weeks. The defence ministry there said in a message on 25 March that 1,351 soldiers had been killed and 3,825 wounded during the special operation in Ukraine.

The head of Ukraine's negotiating group, Davyd Arakhamia, has begun consultations with military officials to get their views on the scale of possible compromises in talks with Russia. He held his first meeting with commanders of units of the Ukrainian Armed Forces in the Chernihiv Oblast. The initiative signals that the negotiators are keen to learn the officers' attitudes to the issue of further resistance, as well as their attitudes to ways of resolving the conflict, including the possibility of concessions related to the Kremlin's expected demilitarisation of Ukraine.

Gas Transmission System Operator of Ukraine has reported instances of Russian soldiers interfering with staff at the Novopskov compressor station in Luhansk Oblast, through which about a third of Russian gas transit passes. It said that these actions threaten the stability of the entire Ukrainian gas pipeline system, and if they continue, the operator may

have to shut down the station, causing disruptions in gas shipments to the EU. ArcelorMittal, the country's largest metallurgical combine located in Kryvyi Rih, announced the start of preparations to resume production (it was halted on 3 March). On 6 April, Zaporizhstal, owned by Rinat Akhmetov, partially resumed production.

According to a survey conducted by the Rating agency, 64% of Ukrainians believe that it is impossible to restore good neighbourly relations with Russia, 22% believe that it will take 20–30 years, and 10% – up to 15 years. As many as 91% of respondents disagree with the thesis that Ukrainians and Russians are one nation; this indicator is lower in the eastern part of the country (70%) and among older people (85%). Only 29% of respondents work in the same way as before the war, 26% – in a limited way, and 3% have found a new job. As many as 41% of Ukrainians lost the opportunity to earn money, and 20% had to leave their place of residence. The initiative to deprive deputies of pro-Russian parties of their mandates is supported by 90% of respondents, and 86% are in favour of banning these groups. 74% of respondents want to sever ties between the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Church, and 51% support banning the former.

According to information from the Polish Border Guard, 2.57 million people have left Ukraine for Poland since the beginning of the war. Only on 7 April there were 23.5 thousand (a decrease of 3% on the previous day). Since 24 February, 516,000 people have crossed the border in the opposite direction.

Commentary

- The defensive operation conducted by the Armed Forces of Ukraine stopped the further advance of the aggressor's troops deep into the territory of the country, and the losses incurred forced it to withdraw from part of the occupied territories. However, the communiqués of the authorities emphasise the high risk of the possibility of launching another phase of the offensive in the east and south in the near future. At present, the Russians are continuing to attack civilian targets – in a further effort to intimidate the population and increase the number of refugees. By increasing civilian casualties, Moscow also wants to force Kyiv into further negotiations and concessions.
- The authorities in Kyiv continue to document Russian atrocities uncovered in the Kyiv, Chernihiv and Sumy oblasts. Further evidence only confirms that the killings of civilians were not random acts or uncontrollable actions by individual units or soldiers. The killing of civilians became part of a strategy to spread fear among citizens, pacify anti-Russian sentiment and exterminate those considered particularly dangerous.
- The ongoing aggression is causing a rapid increase in the national and state self-identification of Ukrainians and their distancing from Russia. In August 2021, the thesis that Ukrainians and Russians are one nation was supported by 41% of respondents, in early March – 21%, and now – only 8%. While in August 75% of respondents considered themselves to be citizens of Ukraine, this percentage has now increased to 98%. This change is permanent – it does not depend on the final outcome of the war.