

## Russia's attack on Ukraine: day 71

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The Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, General Valerii Zaluzhnyi, has reported that the defenders have moved to the offensive in the Kharkiv and Izyum directions, where fierce fighting is ongoing. According to the collective reports of the operational commands 'East', Combined Forces Operations (in Donbas), 'South' and the Air Force Command, the Russians lost within 24 hours: an aircraft, 14 unmanned aerial vehicles, 11 tanks and 14 armoured fighting vehicles, among others. The defence of the Odesa area reported that a winged missile was shot down and a Black Sea Fleet frigate was hit.

The invaders continue to implement the 'ruble zone' in the occupied territories, which is intended to weaken the ties of these territories with the Ukrainian economy and create links with the so-called people's republics and Russia. The announcement of the introduction of the ruble from 1 May has still not been realised – the hryvnia remains in circulation. In Kherson, pensions and social benefits are to continue to be paid by Ukrainian institutions. Russian soldiers, after receiving their pay, exchange roubles for hryvnias in exchange offices. In unofficial circulation, foreign currencies, above all the dollar, are gaining in importance. Difficulties in the rapid introduction of the ruble have led the occupier to announce a four-month transition period allowing payments in Ukrainian currency. During this time, it is planned to open Sberbank outlets and introduce regulations requiring local entrepreneurs to open ruble accounts with it.

In the Zaporizhzhia Oblast, the Russians are forcing residents to fill in documents on land ownership. On presentation of these, cultivation licences will be issued. Failure to register acreage risks confiscation.

Security has been tightened in some Ukrainian cities from 7–10 May as authorities anticipate that rocket fire will increase in connection with Russian Victory Day celebrations. The mayor of Ivano-Frankivsk called on the population to temporarily leave the city and not to gather in public places. In Zaporizhzhia, a stricter curfew was announced, including a ban on movement around the city.

The third stage of the UN-led evacuation of Mariupol has been completed. So far, over 500 civilians have left the city, including 200 people from the embattled Azovstal metallurgical plant. In between transports, aggressor troops are shelling the defended facility. The evacuation is expected to continue on 6 May.

In an interview with the AP news agency, Alexander Lukashenko stated that the Belarusian army would not take part in Russia's war against Ukraine, and that everything Minsk could and can offer Moscow (logistical security of forces, the possibility of air and missile attacks from Belarusian territory) had already been done. He added that the war could be ended

within a week, but this would not happen 'because of the attitude of the United States and Britain'. Lukashenko's assurances that he does not intend to involve the Belarusian army in combat operations in Ukraine are mainly aimed at his own people, concerned about the possibility of participating in an armed conflict.

An international conference of aid donors to Ukraine held in Warsaw on 5 May raised funds worth \$6.5 billion – among other things, the EU will set aside €200 million to support internal refugees. The event discussed the possible transfer to the invaded country of Russian assets frozen in member states. According to Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal, Kyiv has received \$12 billion in financial and arms support since the start of the invasion.

The Polish Border Guard reported that 3.19 million people have left Ukraine for Poland since the outbreak of the war, and 24.6 thousand on May 5 alone (down 1.5% from the previous day). On Thursday, 19,000 people were cleared in the opposite direction, while 1.07 million have left since February 24.

### **Commentary**

- General Zaluzhnyi's information about the Ukrainian army's seizure of the initiative in the Kharkiv Oblast is so far not confirmed by the communiqués of the General Staff and local authorities (civilian and military). In recent days, only the defenders' regaining of control over several localities north and east of Kharkiv has been confirmed. The question of a Ukrainian counter-offensive and the takeover of temporarily occupied territories (including Kherson) remains dependent on the pace and scale of deliveries of heavy weaponry from the West. On the other hand, the ongoing resistance of the defenders and the shipments of arms and military equipment from abroad so far make it impossible for Russia to achieve its military objectives, including the occupation of the whole of Donbas.
- The occupier's plan to quickly incorporate the occupied territories into the ruble zone has encountered organisational difficulties. The announcement of a transitional period allowing for the operation of the hryvnia testifies to delays in the establishment of bank branches and the launch of an electronic transaction system. 'Russification' of the financial space is to be accelerated by forcing representatives of local business to open accounts in Russian banks. In the areas occupied by the invaders, the role of the black market in foreign exchange is growing. Western currencies acquired there are considered to be means of payment offering much greater financial security than the relatively weak rouble.