Analyses OSW

CENTRE FOR EASTERN STUDIES 21.06.2022 www.osw.waw.pl

Russia's attack on Ukraine: day 117

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Fighting continues for the Azot plant, the last point of Ukrainian resistance in Sievierodonetsk. The defenders are repelling Russian attacks on the southern outskirts of the city (Syrotyne), on both sides of the road connecting Hirske with Lysychansk (the villages of Myrna Dolyna and Bila Hora), south-east of Bakhmut and north of Sloviansk (near the villages of Bohorodychne and Dolyna). The aggressor forces continue their assault 'along the Lysychansk–Bakhmut road'. After a break of several days, they resumed offensive operations west of Donetsk (they were repulsed near Marinka) and – after an operational pause of almost two months – southeast of Kharkiv (they carried out battle reconnaissance in the area of Rtyshchivka). They also completed the construction of a makeshift railway bridge over the Donetsk River near Kupiansk on the main supply line for troops in the Izyum area.

Russian artillery and aviation continued to strike Ukrainian positions and hinterland along the lines of troop contact. Outside the Donbas, their targets were mainly Kharkiv and Mykolaiv with surrounding towns and areas around the town of Zelenodolsk south of Kryvyi Rih. Less intense shelling was reported southeast of Zaporizhzhia and in the border areas of the Sumy Oblast. Another day, rockets fell on Ochakiv, Odesa and Bilhorod-Dnistrovskyi. For the first time, the Ukrainian side reported an enemy rocket strike in the Danube estuary. In turn, according to Russian reports, enemy forces carried out a rocket attack on two Chornomornaftohaz oil platforms (seized by the Russians in 2014) 70 km from Odesa.

President Volodymyr Zelensky, in a speech to the African Union, stated that Ukraine has not yet made progress in multilateral negotiations on unblocking grain exports, which would solve the transport crisis. He stressed that under the conditions of the maritime blockade, Kyiv is trying to organise food transport by rail and through the ports of neighbouring countries, but these have less capacity and are more expensive. A solution has still not been found to ensure Russia's cessation of hostilities in the Black Sea. The food crisis was one of the topics of the EU foreign ministers' meeting.

Head of the Ukrainian President's Office Andriy Yermak said that Kyiv makes the resumption of negotiations with Russia conditional on a ceasefire, the withdrawal of troops by Russia and the restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity. He stressed that the authorities of the invaded country strongly reject the possibility of future talks in the international format conventionally called 'Minsk 3'. Referring to issues related to grain shipments by sea, he considered it unacceptable to make the deblocking of Ukrainian ports conditional on the easing of sanctions imposed on the aggressor. He added that the Ukrainian side does not see the possibility of using the railway route leading through Belarus to the Baltic ports. The

only option to ensure full-scale transport of Ukrainian grain is the route through the Black Sea. Its launch will only be possible if security guarantees are received that exclude the possibility of a Russian attack on ports and sea routes.

The invaders took away documentation containing 2019 voter data from the Kherson branch of the state archive, which is likely to be used to create fictitious electoral lists and then falsify the results of the referendum on the region's accession to Russia. A representative of the collaborative authorities in the city expressed hope that the region's incorporation into the Russian Federation would take place by the end of the year. In Berdiansk, the occupation administration forces residents to stand in queues to apply for a Russian passport. People who refuse to participate in the propaganda enterprise are sent to public works. In the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson oblasts, a mobile group of the aggressor army equipped with radio-electronic warfare means became very active. During its work, mobile communications of Ukrainian operators were down and local websites on the Internet were blocked. According to the Ukrainian intelligence service, these activities are intended to help identify individuals displaying anti-Russian attitudes in Ukrainian social networks.

The Security Service of Ukraine has detained two Russian agents operating in the Council of Ministers and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry. As a result of a multi-stage special operation, evidence of espionage activity was obtained by the heads of the department of the Secretariat of the Council of Ministers and one of the directorates of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The detainees provided information on the state of defence capabilities and the situation on the border, as well as personal data of special services and law enforcement officers. For carrying out intelligence tasks, they received between $2,000 and $15,000.

On 20 June, the Verkhovna Rada adopted three laws necessary for the European integration process: it ratified the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the so-called Istanbul Convention), the Law on the Principles of State Anti-Corruption Policy for 2021–2025 and the Law Regulating Waste Management.

Commentary

- Russian attacks in Luhansk Oblast led to the division of the defenders' forces into four independently operating groupings. Although encirclement can only be said to exist in the case of the Azot plant in Sievierodonetsk, in the remaining areas communication between the groupings was significantly impeded. Close to encirclement are the positions southeast of Sievierodonetsk (with the main position in Borivs'ke) and south of Lysychansk (Hirske–Zolote). The defenders of Lysychansk are in a relatively best position, however, recent reports from the local military-civil administration indicate that Ukrainian units are no longer in full control of the Lysychansk–Bakhmut road – the last vital link to the main forces in the Donetsk Oblast. Under current conditions – especially given the aggressor's superiority in artillery and aviation – reinforcement of the defenders in the Luhansk Oblast must be considered highly unlikely. There is also no guarantee of success should the command decide to withdraw them.
- In the occupied territories, the invaders invariably face problems in preparing the annexation referendum and establishing a full-scale collaborationist administration. The

local population, despite ongoing repression, is hostile to the aggressor's annexation projects. The collaborators themselves admit that the 'referendum' may be postponed and that there are difficulties in sorting out the register of its participants. The weakness of the local authorities cooperating with Russia means that military administrations are maintained in the Kherson Oblast and the occupied part of the Zaporizhzhia Oblast to control the situation in the region.