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Ukraine is on the brink of a humanitarian disaster. 270th day of the war

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Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for the Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories Iryna Vereshchuk announced that voluntary evacuation from Ukraine's recaptured southern territories was beginning. The authorities considered it necessary to resettle the population in safer areas due to the damage done to critical infrastructure and the possibility of continued artillery shelling by the Russians.

President Volodymyr Zelensky stated that Russian rocket attacks had temporarily deprived some 20 million people of electricity. On 19 November, the head of Ukraine's largest private energy company DTEK Maksym Timchenko stated that given the colossal damage to power lines, Ukrainians who have the opportunity should be ready to leave the country before the onset of winter. In his opinion, this would be very beneficial for relieving the state's energy system and help guarantee electricity supplies for the needs of the war. Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal, in turn, assured that the government is preparing for all possible scenarios of developments related to power cuts. Imports of energy generation devices are being activated, and any citizen can import a generator or charging station without paying customs duties and VAT. According to Shmyhal, daily imports of approx. 8,500 power generators.

The number of Russian missile attacks on Ukrainian infrastructure was significantly reduced (from ten on 18 November to two on 20 November). Zaporizhzhia, where industrial infrastructure was damaged, and Kramatorsk were the main targets. According to information presented by President Zelensky on 20 November, the Russians have used more than 4,700 missiles against Ukraine since 24 February.

Russian artillery and aviation have not ceased attacks on Ukrainian army positions and facilities along the contact lines and in border areas. Kherson and the river port there, neighbouring Antonivka (with the ruins of bridges over the Dnieper) and Chornobaivka (with its airport) are to come under increasing fire. Both sides are shelling each other's positions south of Mykolaiv. Ukrainian forces also shelled and bombarded Russian positions in the main combat areas — fuel tankers in occupied Makiivka were hit, among others.

Russian units are continuing attacks on Ukrainian positions in Donbas. The heaviest fighting continues on the southern and eastern outskirts of Bakhmut, northeast of the city and west of the Bakhmut–Horlivka road. The invaders once again unsuccessfully pushed east of Siversk and west of Donetsk. Mutual attacks took place on the border of the Kharkiv and Luhansk oblasts. Ukrainian forces also counterattacked in the western part of the Donetsk

Oblast and attempted to break Russian positions east of Kupiansk and northwest of Kreminna. Ukrainian sources report that more Russian subunits withdrawn from the right bank of the Dnieper River are being redeployed to the Luhansk Oblast.

The French defence ministry announced the transfer of two Crotale air defence systems to Ukraine and its receipt of two multiple rocket launchers. The UK announced the delivery of 120 anti-aircraft guns, radar stations and winter equipment to the Ukrainian army. Mykhailo Podolak, the advisor to the head of the Ukrainian President's Office, stated that at the current stage of the conflict with Russia, Ukrainian forces need an additional 150–200 tanks, 100 barrel artillery systems, about 300 armoured vehicles, 50–70 rocket artillery systems and 10–15 anti-missile systems.

According to the Federal Penitentiary Service, in September and October, the number of detainees decreased by more than 23,000. They were most likely recruited to participate in the war with Ukraine by the so-called private military company Wagner. The first reports of prisoners being recruited for 'volunteer' units appeared in July. The head of the so-called Wagner group, Yevgeny Prigozhin, who was in charge of the operation, publicly promised the convicts that they would be pardoned after six months of participation in military action.

On 19 November, the Ukrainian government's National Resistance Centre reported that the Federal Security Service (FSB) had created special operational groups to search for members of the Ukrainian underground. Despite increased repression, the Russians cannot effectively control the situation in the occupied territories. The groups are made up of FSB counterintelligence personnel and other services. The groups are also tasked with controlling internet traffic and identifying targets for missile attacks. The Ukrainian General Staff has warned that there is a threat of armed provocation by an aggressor in the areas bordering the Bryansk and Kursk oblasts. The Ukrainian side is counting on the possibility of the entry of Russian sabotage and reconnaissance groups from the territory of Belarus. On the same day, Ukrainian military intelligence (HUR) reported that Russian special services were planning provocations on Belarusian critical infrastructure facilities, including the Astravets Nuclear Power Plant. Citizens of NATO countries and Ukraine dressed in Belarusian uniforms will be identified as the perpetrators of such 'terrorist acts'. The structures of the Belarusian KGB, Interior Ministry and border troops have been put on high alert.

The Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) revealed neutralising of a criminal group that organised the smuggling of men wishing to avoid military service. Those interested were offered to arrange transport to the South Caucasus or EU countries via the territory of the Russian Federation (routes led through Crimea or Sumy Oblast). The cost of the 'service' ranged from $2,500 to $8,000. Members of the smuggling group cooperated with officers of the border service of the Russian Federation.

Commentary

- The progressive destruction of energy infrastructure puts Ukraine on the threshold of a humanitarian disaster caused by the interruption of electricity, water and heat supplies. Numerous Russian missile attacks may lead to the decisions to evacuate the population from major cities (e.g. on 16 November, the mayor of Ivano-Frankivsk appealed to residents to leave the city for the winter due to the risk of energy supply interruptions)

and to an increase in the scale of migration out of Ukraine. The reduction or lack of energy supply radically worsens the condition of the industry and hinders the operation of commercial facilities and companies providing services to the population.

- Following the withdrawal of Russian units from right-bank Ukraine, the front line has been relatively stabilised. Both sides seem to be unable to achieve any apparent success — Russians in Donetsk Oblast, while Ukrainians at the junction of Kharkiv and Luhansk oblasts. Both focus on reinforcing forces in the combat areas with the troops that previously operated around Kherson. The invaders continue to direct troops there from the so-called 'partial mobilisation' and expanding defensive lines, mainly in Zaporizhzhia Oblast. This does not mean abandoning offensive operations, with the Ukrainian army continuing to be the more active party in this respect. It is consistently trying to break through Russian defences in the direction of Svatove and Kreminna and is also gathering forces in Zaporizhzhia Oblast, Melitopol being the natural main target of its offensive. The development of a new offensive by the Russians, who have gone on the defensive in most directions outside the Donetsk Oblast, remains an open question. In all likelihood, they aim to exhaust the offensive potential of the Ukrainian side in the first place.