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Slovakia suspends its military support to Ukraine. Day 623 of the war

Andrzej Wilk, Piotr Żochowski

Russian forces have made slight advances in the Avdiivka area, narrowing the width of the belt linking the town to Ukrainian-controlled areas to 6–8 km. They are also moving north and south-west of Bakhmut, where, according to the Ukrainian General Staff, the number of assaults has increased to a level of 30 per day, a level not seen since springtime (near Klishchiivka the Russians have pushed their opponents away from the Bakhmut-Horlivka railway line); Russian troops have also made advances north-east of Kupyansk (in the area of the village of Pershotravneve). Despite these attacks, Ukrainian forces are holding their positions in Krynky, on the left bank of the Dnieper, and are developing a bridgehead (according to some sources, they have begun to move heavy armour reinforcements there). The offensive actions which both sides undertook in other areas (including another Ukrainian attack near Verbove south of Orikhiv) have not been successful. The Ukrainian General Staff still emphasises that Marinka is one of the most active sections on the front, where the enemy is launching up to 20 assaults per day.

The frequency of Russian attacks deeper inside Ukrainian territory has decreased. According to the Ukrainian side, on 7 November the invaders fired six missiles, hitting infrastructure facilities near Kryvyi Rih (according to some sources, the airport was struck) and the north-eastern outskirts of Zaporizhzhia were hit. On the following day the Russians used only two missiles (most likely once again targeting the airfield in Myrhorod), one of which was shot down; on the night of 9 November, they fired only one (which was destroyed near the city of Dnipro). However, the Russian use of guided aerial bombs is increasing. According to a spokesman for the Ukrainian Air Force Command, Colonel Yuri Ihnat, the Russians are dropping more than 100 bombs weighing 500 kg every day, causing heavy damage in the frontline area 20-30 km from the line of contact. Ihnat stressed that the defenders do not have the capability to counter these attacks; they need weapons to shoot down the bombers.

On 7 November, Ukrainian forces shelled Donetsk, probably using HIMARS systems. According to the defenders, they were targeting a drone service training centre and a drone assembly plant. However, the city saw the destruction of civilian infrastructure and, according to local reports, some of the worst civilian casualties to date (six people were reported killed and 55 wounded). On 9 November, a Ukrainian drone with cluster missiles was said to have hit Sudzha in the Russian Federation's Kursk oblast (near the border with Ukraine). Local news reports spoke of damage to the premises of a food production company.

On 7 November, the first five aircraft from the Dutch Air Force arrived at the Romanian Fetești base, where a training centre for Ukrainian F-16 fighter crews and crews is being set up. Initially, they will be used to upskill instructors (their nationalities were not given) who will train the Ukrainians. The centre is expected to come into operation in the near future, with the Netherlands eventually planning to deploy between 12 and 18 aircraft. The following day, the Spanish army staff announced the arrival of dozens of Ukrainian servicemen at the 74th Anti-Aircraft Artillery Regiment (at Dos Hermanas near Seville) to be trained in the use of Hawk anti-aircraft missile systems. On 9 November, Radio Prague reported that the Senate of the Czech Republic had extended the mandate of the training mission for Ukrainian soldiers until the end of 2024. In line with the Czech government's proposal, the possibility for representatives of other NATO and/or EU countries to participate in the training was extended; this will maintain the number of foreign instructors at up to 800.

The French defence minister Sébastien Lecornu announced on 8 November that Paris would grant Kyiv €200 million to purchase French armaments. On the same day, the new Slovak government rejected the 14th military support package which its predecessor had prepared. It was to have included 140 missiles for Kub air defence systems, 5172 pieces of 125-mm tank ammunition, 4 million 7.62mm rifle cartridges, eight mortars and 1200 mines, with a total value of €40.3 million. Earlier, the newly-appointed Prime Minister Robert Fico announced that Bratislava would no longer provide military support to Ukraine, but it did not intend to block the sale of armaments and military equipment to Kyiv by Slovak companies. In total, the Slovaks have sent equipment worth at least €671 million to the Ukrainian army in 13 packages. The Rheinmetall corporation, in turn, reported that it had received an order from the German government to supply Ukraine with 100,000 120-mm mortar grenades. The deliveries will be spread over two years, and are expected to start soon. The order will be paid for out of a pool of €400 million earmarked for German industry to make purchases for Ukraine.

Also on 8 November, Estonia's intelligence chief Ants Kiviselg presented information on Russia's increase in arms production. Among other things, the invaders are expected to have the capacity to produce 1000 Shahed-136 kamikaze drones (specifically, the Russian Geran-2 variant) per month. Kiviselg estimated Russia's annual capacity to produce artillery munitions in the millions. In doing so, he added that the Russian Federation had recently received between 300,000 and 500,000 artillery shells from North Korea. Two days earlier, the deputy head of the Ukrainian Military Intelligence Service (HUR), Vadym Skibitsky, reported Russia's increased production of missiles and drones. According to HUR, 115 cruise and ballistic missiles were produced in October (40 Kh-101s, 20 Kalibrs, 30 Iskander-Ms, 12 Iskander-Ks, four Kinzhals and nine Kh-32s). The Russian army is expected to maintain a permanent stock of missiles, currently numbering 870 (290 Iskander-Ms and Iskander-Ks, 165 Kalibrs, 160 Kh-101/Kh-55/Kh-555s, 150 Kh-22/Kh-32s and 80 Kinzhals). Skibitsky pointed out that the enemy is also using Oniks anti-ship cruise missiles to attack ground targets, and is also working on improving them. Referring to the Geran-2 kamikaze drones, on the other hand, he said that the Russian Federation is capable of producing a few dozen of them per month on its own, but it plans to increase this number to at least 200. Some of the components for their production are still to be imported from Iran.

On 7 November, Ukraine's defence minister Rustem Umierov dismissed emerging rumours that the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces Valerii Zaluzhnyi was about to resign. He stated that some parliamentarians are trying to divide society and are assisting Russian propagandists. A day later, the Ukrainian Centre for Countering Disinformation (CCD) reported that a recording of Zaluzhnyi's speech, faked using deepfake technology, had been circulated via TikTok and Telegram messengers as part of a Russian disinformation operation. In the fake message, he allegedly called on the citizens of Ukraine to protest against the government and for the military to stop carrying out orders. The CCD stressed that the Russians are trying to create a rift between the president and the army.

On 7 November, the social channels of the 'I want to live' project (which was established under the aegis of HUR and deals with Russian prisoners of war) reported that a new POW camp would be established in the near future, most likely located in western Ukraine. There is currently one camp of this type, 'Zakhid-1', which was established last July on the site of a penal colony in Lviv oblast.

Also on 7 November, a demining centre was opened in Chernihiv oblast under the supervision of the defence ministry's Special Transport Service. The main partner in the construction of the facility was the Metinvest group, linked to oligarch Rinat Akhmetov, which contributed 9.5 million hryvnias (over $250,000). The centre's main tasks include the training of some 3000 sappers. Earlier, the Metinvest metallurgical plant began producing tank mine rollers.

On 8 November, British military intelligence said that reports from independent Russian media about a large number of acts of sabotage on railway lines were credible. Since February last year, Russian courts have prosecuted at least 137 people for sabotage. Since the beginning of this year, warnings have been posted on key rail infrastructure sites, with the threat of life imprisonment for damaging them.

On the same day, the Ukrainian government's National Resistance Centre pointed out that troops operating within the Russian National Guard made up of former Wagner mercenaries had been given permission to recruit prisoners incarcerated in penal colonies in the occupied territories. It was emphasised that they were being sent to the front line without proper preparation, resulting in high losses.

Commentary

- The declaration by the new Slovak government that it will suspend military support to Kyiv while emphasising the maintenance of commercial cooperation has highlighted the ongoing changes in European countries' approach to the issue of supplying the Ukrainian army. Most of the countries providing military support to Ukraine have been emphasising the development of business relations and the sale of armaments for many months now, instead of transferring them from their own resources. France has openly pursued such a policy since September, but, as further reports from Rheinmetall indicate, this also applies to countries that have described their activities as strictly charitable. This is the result of the depletion of stockpiles and a reluctance to disarm their own troops (especially in view of the limited defence resources of most European countries) on the one hand, and the increasingly clear intention to derive the maximum material benefit from the war on the other. Even if equipment for the Ukrainian army is purchased not at

Kyiv's cost, but that of the countries supplying them, it will represent an investment in the country's arms industry, the value of which increases in direct proportion to the growing awareness in the West that the threat of armed aggression by Russia is as real as it could possibly be.

