

February 26th

A brief overview of the situation

- 1. Developments in the conflict.** On the third day of the war—despite ongoing fighting around Ukraine's capital, Kyiv—Russian troops have not entered Kiev. This has led to the increased deployment of reconnaissance groups and landing forces in other regions of Ukraine. Assault forces have tried to capture bridgeheads in the cities of Mykolaiv, Vasilkiv and Hostomel (the latter two notable for having military airfields). At the same time, Ukrainian forces have lost control of the city of Melitopol in Zaporizhzhia oblast. So far, the Russian offensive around the Azov Sea has seen the least resistance. Fighting continues near Mariupol. It is likely that the Russians will try to seize the city of Mariupol in the near future—which would have the effect of uniting Crimea with the *Certain Areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk Regions* (CADLR) by a land corridor. In the zone of the Joint Forces Operation (JFO) the Ukrainian forces have lost control over the town of Stanytsia Luhanska, where the only active entry and exit check point in the Luhansk oblast exists between the part under Ukrainian control and the CADLR. While large cities are coming under siege, small towns are being damaged by shelling.
- 2. Missile strikes against civil infrastructure have increased sharply in frequency.** On 26th February a missile hit a high-rise apartment building in Kyiv, causing significant destruction. There have been numerous other cases of projectiles hitting residential buildings along the entire front line. This may be indicative of tactics of intimidation towards the civilian population. Yesterday the Ukrainian military have already noted that Russian forces have begun to act more indiscriminately. The Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine is also reporting that Russian forces have begun to use cluster bombs (in particular, during the shelling of Kharkiv). In Okhtyrka in the Sumy Oblast, which is an important transport hub, a kindergarten was destroyed with 3 people dead and 17 children wounded as a result of shelling.
- 3. Environment.** There is an ongoing threat to nuclear facilities due to Russian offensives in the Rivne oblast near the NPP. Overnight there has been fighting also around the Kyiv heat and power plant No. 6, which is critical infrastructure for the proper functioning of the city. **Should there be damage to the dams of power plants, in particular that of the Kyiv power plant,** this could have catastrophic consequences. According to some reports, on February 26th the dam of the North-Crimean Canal was damaged, which may incapacitate the canal linking the Kherson oblast and Crimea.
- 4. Negotiations.** The Ukrainian government has refused the terms for negotiations which have been proposed by Russian government. **These terms would have amounted to Ukraine's surrender,** demilitarisation and the loss of territories. On the other hand, Ukrainian President Zelenskyy has proposed negotiations in Jerusalem—apparently in an attempt to refute the Russian narrative that the President of Ukraine is a neo-Nazi. There appear to be limited prospects of the start of negotiations. **Today the representatives of pro-Russian political forces in Ukraine tried to force Zelenskyy to capitulate.** Russian media have focused on pro-Russian politician, notably Ilya Kiva, as a possible alternative. The proposes would not lead to a sustainable end of the conflict, because the Ukrainian population will not support them. The space for negotiable political solutions or proposals is currently limited to non-existent.
- 5. Humanitarian dimension.** The war is forcing many Ukrainians to leave their homes and try to cross the borders to the west of the country. Most refugees have only a few possessions and basic supplies. Western Ukrainian cities are under stress from IDP flows. There is the possibility that there will be provocations and the spread of panic among the civilian population. Periodically the cities receiving the bulk of IDPs (e.g. Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk) are also subjected to air attacks by Russia. They are also being surveilled by reconnaissance UAVs.
- 6. Important areas for consideration of possible mediation efforts** include those focused on reaching humanitarian ceasefires, and the establishment of humanitarian corridors for civilians. The issues of the exchange of the POWs, casualties and the dead have also been tabled by Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration, Mr. Vereshchuk.