

**March 7th - April 3rd, 2023  
Ukraine Monthly Situation Report**

**CONFLICT DEVELOPMENTS**

- Last week the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (hereinafter: AFRF) continued their advance in the Donetsk, Luhansk oblasts and partly in the Zaporizhzhia oblast, with support from private paramilitary groups. Attempts to encircle Bakhmut, Vuhledar, Avdiivka, and other cities in the Donetsk oblast, as well as to advance in the direction of Lyman continued. On 3 April, the Russian Federation (hereinafter: Russia) claimed it had taken Bakhmut. Ukraine refuted this information. However, hostilities are now taking place within the city limits. According to the Ukrainian government, as of 3 April the overall losses suffered by Russia amounted to [175.000](#) soldiers killed. The cities located along the line of contact are constantly subjected to shelling and are uninhabitable.
- The Armed Forces of Ukraine (hereinafter: AFU) may be preparing a counteroffensive that would target a limited stretch of the front. Presently, despite modern [tanks](#) and Soviet [fighter jets](#) being supplied to Ukraine, the AFU does not have sufficient equipment or shells to launch a large-scale offensive. At the end of March Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy visited almost all sections of the front (the Kharkiv, Donetsk, and Zaporizhzhia oblasts). The explosions taking place in Ukraine's occupied territories aim to disrupt logistics and the control system, as well as destroy the Russian army's munitions. In an attempt to prepare for the AFU's counteroffensive, Russia is setting up anti-tank barriers in [Crimea](#), and the Bryansk oblast.
- Large-scale missile and drone attacks continue to hit Ukrainian cities. On the night of 6 March, Ukraine was attacked by 13 kamikaze drones. On 9 March, Russia launched [81 missiles](#) (34 were downed by the Ukrainian air defense). For the first time Russians simultaneously fired six hypersonic [Kinzhal missiles](#) at Ukraine. On 14 March, 4 anti-radiation missiles were launched at Odesa, with their debris damaging objects of civilian infrastructure. On the night of 18 March, 5 kamikaze drones were launched toward the Dnipropetrovsk oblast, with two of them hitting a critical infrastructure company. On the same night, drones damaged an object located near the Polish border in the [Lviv](#) oblast. Overall, on the night of 17-18 March, at least [16 drones](#) were launched, with 11 of them downed. On 21 March, three [cruise missiles](#) were fired at Odesa. One of them hit an orthodox monastery. The following day, 21 kamikaze drones were launched towards the Kyiv and Zhytomyr oblasts, with 16 shot down by the Ukrainian air defense. On 24 March, Russia launched 6 kamikaze drones, 10 guided bombs, and three cruise missiles. In addition, five drones hit infrastructure objects in Kryvyi Rih. On the night of 28 March, [12 kamikaze drones](#) were exposed and downed close to Kyiv, with a further four launched at other oblasts.
- Last month cities including [Kyiv](#), [Kherson](#), [Zaporizhzhia](#), [Kharkiv](#), Rzhyschiv, Nikopol, Marhanets, [Kryvyi Rih](#), Orikhiv, [Beryslav](#), Ochakiv, Novomoskovsk, Kamyanske, Velykyi Burluk, [Kupyansk](#), Chuhuiv, Shostka, Zolochiv, Vovchansk, [Kramatorsk](#), Kostyantynivka, Vuhledar, [Avdiivka](#), Druzhkivka, Kurakhove, [Sloviansk](#), Chasiv Yar, New York, Toretsk and other settlements in the Chernihiv, Kharkiv, and Sumy oblasts (located [close to the Russian border](#)) were subjected to shelling.

- At the end of March and the beginning of April, the one-year anniversary of the liberation of Kyiv and other northern oblasts of Ukraine was celebrated, with the presence of Ukraine's leadership and foreign delegations.
- A new discussion about the liberation of Crimea has taken place. Oleksii Danilov, Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council (NSDC), unveiled 12 steps towards the [liberation](#) of the peninsula. At the same time, on 18 March Russian President Vladimir Putin [visited](#) Crimea, before travelling to Mariupol. This was meant to send a message that Russia is serious about the territories it has captured.

## HUMANITARIAN DIMENSIONS

- According to [official data provided by juvenile prosecutors](#), 467 Ukrainian children have died with 944 wounded with various degrees of severity since the beginning of the invasion. 19.528 children are considered to have been deported. Russia claims to have relocated [744.000 Ukrainian children](#). However, the Ukrainian government insists that this figure cannot be verified. There is proof that Russia forcibly relocated [4390 Ukrainian children](#), who are either partially or full orphans, from the temporarily occupied territories. Ukraine has offered Russia a [mechanism to](#) return deported Ukrainian orphans. For example, Ukraine is ready to pick them up at Russia-Estonia's border. Due to the shelling of Avdiivka, [a 5-month-old](#) boy was killed.
- Putin signed a law on the [spring call-up campaign](#), according to which 147.000 soldiers will be drafted between 1 April and 15 July. This comes in the face of Russia continuing to lose a huge amount of manpower. According to [Le Monde](#), in the battle of Bakhmut for every fallen Ukrainian soldier Russia has lost seven. Moreover, at least [2000 Russian officers](#) have been killed since the start of the war.
- While retreating from Kherson, the Russian army relocated [2500 Ukrainian prisoners](#) without their permission. They were first taken to Crimea and subsequently dispersed among colonies in Southern Russia. While they were due to join the "Wagner Group" operations, this did not happen. According to the prisoners, they were offered Russian nationality but very few took it.
- Ukraine spends some [130 billion UAH](#) monthly on the war, while the government receives some 80 billion UAH in income for the same period.
- Explosive-contaminated areas of Ukraine are 4.5 [times](#) the size of Switzerland. Overall, 180.000 square kilometers of Ukraine's territories need to be cleared of explosives.
- According to the United Nations (UN), approximately 4.9 million Ukrainian citizens have acquired [temporary protection status](#), which is about 1% of the entire EU population. Most refugees (87%) are women and children.
- As of now Ukraine has fulfilled [72% of its obligations](#) vis-à-vis its Association Agreement with the EU. According to the report, in 2022 the number of obligations fulfilled by Ukraine rose by 9%.
- Due to the war, [7,1 million of Ukrainian citizens](#) (17% of the population) are below the poverty line, while the country's economy has been thrown back fifteen years.
- There is continuing tension around the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which until 2022 was subordinated to the Moscow Patriarchate. On 29 March, the rental [agreement](#) between the Kyiv-

Pechersk Lavra and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (hereinafter: UOC MP) expired. The government had previously restored two key cathedrals of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra to its ownership the Holy Assumption Cathedral and the Refectory Church. Despite the UOC MP's taking steps to distance itself from Moscow, a government committee found that no real change had happened. In view of this, there is now a battle for the cathedrals in the Ivano-Frankivsk and Khmelnytskyi oblasts. Furthermore, the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra is being contested. During Viktor Yanukovich's presidency, the UOC MP was offered the Lavra for unlimited use. In March 2023, the rental agreement was terminated. While tensions in Kyiv have not grown into violent clashes, the simmering conflict could lead to an outbreak of violence at any time.

- Ukrainian society is up in arms about several issues including the controversial health care reform as well as students at some universities being forced to return to in-person lessons. The stress and social dissatisfaction caused by the war could become an obstacle on Ukraine's European integration path. A small incident may lead to unpredictable events.
- As of 27 March, [150.000 tons of agricultural produce](#) was exported from Ukrainian ports to Asian countries within the framework of the "grain deal". In total, Ukraine has exported [25.2 million tons of agricultural produce](#) to Asian, European, and African countries. Despite Russian manipulation and disinformation over the duration of the deal, all parties of the grain deal, other than Russia, have stated that the agreement [has been extended for 120 days](#).
- On the first anniversary of the war, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [released confirmed data](#) about civilian victims. After one year of war, 8006 civilians have been killed, with 13.287 wounded. However, the UN believes that the real number is much higher.
- The Russian occupiers continue to [loot and pillage](#) Ukraine's temporarily occupied territories. In Melitopol, the Russians are removing the timber that they have illegally cut. Ukrainian citizens living in the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia oblasts are forced to [acquire Russian citizenship](#). Furthermore, in the Henichesk and Strilkove settlements (located in the Kherson oblast), the movement of Ukrainian citizens who do not have Russian passports, is restricted through Russian checkpoints and across the region. The Russians are searching for these citizens and threatening them with a travel ban if they cross a Russian checkpoint for a fourth time. In the Zaporizhzhia oblast, particularly in Melitopol, the Russians are [forcing](#) local teachers to renounce their Ukrainian citizenship and take Russian passports by 1 June 2023.

## **ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL DIMENSIONS**

- The Russian presidency of the UN Security Council (hereinafter: UNSC) is a further reminder of the breakdown of the UN. It has triggered a reaction from many governments, leading to the reform of the UN being put back on the agenda. Volodymyr Zelenskyy [has said](#) that "there is no form of terror that has not been deployed by Russia. There is not a single reason to prevent the reform of the global institutions, particularly the UNSC". Ukraine's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dmytro Kuleba, [believes](#) that the process of depriving Russia of the status of a permanent member of the UNSC and its expulsion from the UN is realistic if work to this end is carried out systematically.

- According to inside information, the NSDC is planning to make a decision regarding the implementation of the [Concept](#) for the National System of Resilience. In addition, a series of working groups preparing proposals regarding the Action Plan on the implementation of the Concept of Resilience are about to start under the aegis of the Vice Prime Minister.
- Ukrainian experts are evaluating and [forecasting](#) a strengthened resilience and economic efficiency of infrastructure, a structural transformation of the economy and leading sectors through investment, and the skillful use of the EU candidate status as well as the abolition of quotas with the goal to scale up business models oriented on exports to the EU. In particular, experts have focused on: 1) reform of the energy sector towards more flexibility and decentralization; 2) the opportunity to reform the Ukrainian steel industry which has been badly affected (destruction of the largest steel factories, blockade of ports and export channels) by the war; 3) orientation of the trade with the EU; 4) economic and social consequences of the price shock — higher prices on energy, natural gas and heating; 5) economic ramifications of a counteroffensive by the AFU; 6) unemployment (2.8 million unemployed Ukrainians, including economically active citizens and those who were forced to leave the country).
- The government has announced a number of decisions to avoid a crisis at the regional and community level, as well as to ensure the work of local governance in the context of martial law. The Ukrainian government is also working on a solution to ensure the financial resilience of communities (sources of income for local budgets amid war and martial law). Five priorities for a quick recovery have been presented: energy, reparation of damaged housing, critical infrastructure, demining and economic recovery. The Heads of the oblast civil and military administrations have been called upon to quickly [prepare](#) relevant project documentation for all of five areas. It is also foreseen that the newly formed Agency for Recovery engage with the regions, should a certain region or community require funds or support in the implementation of projects. The bills 6504 and 4298 (aimed at improving the transparency and accountability of local governments, enhancing the protection of local authorities, and introducing European standards of local governance) are about to be considered by the Ukrainian parliament. Offices for the support of reforms in the communities are due to be launched (urgent consulting support for local authorities regarding the development of anticorruption practices, work with recovery projects and digital instruments). The case of the city of Mykolayiv, which has been presented by its mayor, is quite informative. The city decided to have direct cooperation with international organizations, donors and the government of Denmark with aim of conducting a quality [assessment](#) and preparation for a complex project on the city's recovery.
- The Ukrainian government [predicts](#) economic growth at 1% in 2023. Analysts believe that growth will range from 0,5% to 3%, despite the 2022 economy shrinking by 29,2%, which was the worst result in Ukraine's modern history.
- Ukraine has officially invited China to participate in the implementation of the [peace formula](#). At a press conference President Zelenskyy stated “we have offered the world our formula for peace, and this also applies to relations with China. We publicly, through diplomatic channels, conveyed to China our formula for peace and an invitation to participate in this formula. We invite you to dialogue and wait for a response”.

## INFORMATION WARFARE DIMENSIONS

- **“Trust in the president”, “rally around him”.** Russian official discourse claims that Russian society rallies around Putin. Russia shares messages about the high level of trust in Putin and Russian society supporting his policies. According to a [survey](#) conducted on 10 March, the vast majority of Russians (80%) trust Putin. His policies are supported by 76,7% (according to a survey by the Russian Public Opinion Research Center (hereinafter: RPORC). It is claimed that this support has grown compared to February. Putin deploys mobilization rhetoric against a backdrop of threats to Russia’s security from the West. The Russian president also [spoke](#) about threats to Russia’s security and the need for Russians to unite to respond to these threats. Also, messages about Russian support for Putin increasing as the country continues to [prosper](#) are being circulated. At the end of March, the Russian information space was full of messages about the results of a social survey, which concluded that approximately 80% of Russians support their president ([RPORC](#)). In other words, support is growing.
- **Downplaying the arrest warrant for the Russian president.** The accusations levelled at Putin regarding violations of international criminal law is interpreted by the Russian media in the context of the confrontation between Russia and the West. On 20 March, the Investigative Committee of Russia [instituted criminal proceedings](#) against the judges of the International Criminal Court (hereinafter: ICC) who issued an arrest warrant for Putin along with Maria Lvova-Belova, the Presidential Commissioner for Children’s Rights in Russia. The warrant was declared worthless by the Russian media. Moscow believes that this is [“an absurd and useless decision that discredits international institutions \(privatized by the West\) even more”](#). In Russia information has been published claiming that Lvova-Belova [is helping](#) Ukrainian families reunite with their children. Dmitry Medvedev, Deputy Chairman of the Security Council of Russia, called the ICC “a miserable organization”. He also threatened [to hit the ICC premises](#) with a hypersonic missile. Vyacheslav Volodin, Speaker of the Duma, [has said](#) that the persecution of Putin is tantamount to the persecution of the whole of Russia.
- **“Constant victories of the Russian army, Ukrainian losses”.** Russia is permanently spreading [narratives](#) about the success of the Russian army at the front (in particular, in the Donetsk direction), about destroyed Ukrainian military equipment due to the [efficiency](#) of the Russian army, as well as the [destruction](#) of Ukrainian control rooms. The Kremlin also speaks about the AFRF’s so-called “strategic approach”. Sergei Shoigu, Russian Defence Minister, [claims](#) that “capturing Bakhmut will allow the AFRF to continue their offensive deep into the AFU’s positions”. [Victorious](#), glorifying messages about how well the Russian army is fighting in the “special military operation” (SMO) are circulated throughout the country. The Russian Ministry of Defense has told Russian society that the AFRF is [destroying](#) the AFU in different directions, while also hitting Ukrainian military depots. The Russian media mainly covers the Donetsk and Zaporizhzhia oblasts. At the same time, official Russian channels spread the [statement](#) made by Evgeny Prigozhyn, head of the “Wagner” group, regarding the situation in Bakhmut. Russian messages about the enormous loss of manpower, by the AFU [abound](#). Shoigu has [said](#) that over 20.000 Ukrainian military objects have been destroyed in the SMO.

The Russian media has been writing about “[mercenaries](#)” from the Arab states, Poland, the USA, Spain and other countries fighting for the AFU.

- **Discrediting the Ukrainian army, political leadership, accusations of “terrorism”.** Against the backdrop of stories about the achievements of the Russian army, the Russian media is discrediting the AFU. Moscow promote narratives about the “crimes” committed by the Ukrainian army against civilians, in particular, the [shelling](#) of the temporarily occupied territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, chemical plants ([in Horlivka](#)), shelling Russian regions located close to the Ukrainian border, etc. Ukraine is also accused of committing “[war crimes](#)”. The Russian official media are [spreading](#) fake information about reprisals (concentration camps) taken by the Ukrainian government against those not willing to fight Russia. The Kremlin also claims that Ukraine is persecuting Russian speaking citizens and that the Ukrainian regime is deliberately [sending](#) using them as cannon fodder in the most dangerous areas of the front. According to other narratives, “[mobilization in Ukraine has mainly touched eastern parts of the country, taking on horrible dimensions](#)”. Moscow believes that Ukraine is doing this in order to exterminate Russian speaking citizens.  
The Ukrainian government is being accused of terrorism, [organizing the killing](#) of the war correspondent, Vladlen Tatarsky, during a concert in Saint Petersburg on 2 April 2023. The Russian media claim that “[Ukraine is killing](#)” Russians who speak against the Kyiv authorities. The “eviction” of the representatives of the UOC MP from the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra is portrayed as [reprisals](#). The website of the Russian Orthodox Church contains a special page dedicated to the “violations of the rights of parishioners of the UOC MP”.
- **Glorification of the SMO. The discourse of WWII. Longing for the USSR.** Russian military discourse is becoming routinized and glorified. The official media continue to promote the positive image of the “SMO”, immortalizing “heroes” and those fighting in the operation (in the [Stavropol](#) Krai a center for military and sports preparation has been named after “a hero” of the SMO). The Russian State Duma has suggested [naming](#) a street in honor of Vladlen Tatarsky, who was killed in the explosion in St. Petersburg on 2 April. Putin addressed Russian society, speaking about the Russian military “[demonstrating bravery and fearlessness](#)”. The Russian president has also [introduced](#) a new medal “for bravery” to be bestowed on Russians and foreigners. In parallel, Russian official discourse is full of narratives praising mobilization, glorifying Stalin as the leader who transformed the economy of the Soviet Union to satisfy the military needs. Dmitry Medvedev even [read out](#) a telegram written by Stalin during WWII to directors of military plants. Medvedev [expressed](#) nostalgic sentiment when speaking about the collapse of the USSR. At the regional level, the Russian media [are spreading messages](#) about the social support provided for the participants of the SMO. At the same time, the partial mobilization is mainly glossed over by Russian official propaganda outlets.
- **About the readiness to negotiate (political and diplomatic solution).** Ahead of the visit of the Chinese President to Russia, Putin had [announced](#) Russia’s readiness for a political and diplomatic solution to the situation in Ukraine. However, particular ways and tools for settling the conflict have not been provided by Russia, other than [supporting China](#) in this regard. Russian official media are spreading the narratives about China [now playing](#) the main role in the process of solving the conflict.

- **“Retaliation strike”, justifying massive missile attacks on Ukrainian civilian infrastructure.** Russia continues to justify its shelling of Ukrainian energy infrastructure and the destruction of the civilian infrastructure. The official Russian media [referred to](#) the missile attacks on Ukrainian energy and civilian infrastructure on 9 March as a “retaliation strike” in view of Ukraine allegedly preparing terrorist attacks in the Bryansk oblast.  
Some of Russia’s narratives offer [an explanation](#) as to “why Ukraine did not freeze last winter”. While the tactic of shelling Ukraine’s energy infrastructure objects was quite successful, according to the Russian propaganda did not do many people leave Ukraine and then return in the Spring, but the fact that the winter was warm, helped the country survive.
- **“We do not abandon our own”. Social support for the families of those fighting in the “SMO”.** Against the backdrop of messages about “the success achieved by the AFRF”, Russia is permanently spreading narratives about the [aid](#) provided to the families of soldiers and those drafted. The Russian media cover the measures taken to support the families in Russian regions. According to some messages, [“order has been reestablished”](#) in relevant [regions](#) in terms of social payments. It is claimed that the families of those fighting in the SMO are being offered [help](#) (e.g., [healthcare assistance](#) in the Chuvashia Republic). The Russian media write about Putin setting up specialized [foundations](#). According to some media outlets, regional support programs are being introduced. Putin has [met](#) with Ramzan Kadyrov to thank him personally as well as the Chechens for fighting in the SMO. Russian [official](#) channels circulated the video of the two leaders’ meeting.
- **“Reprisals in Ukraine”.** Narratives are being promoted about the reprisals against the UOC MP. A number of statements have been made by Patriarch [Kirill](#) about the “state exerting pressure” on the UOC MP.
- **“Expanding into the “new regions”, “we do not abandon our own”. Integration of the “new regions” into Russia”.** Russian official discourse is full of messages about the integration of the “new regions”. Steps aimed at the integration of the new regions of the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson oblasts into Russia continue. Russian media refer to detentions of and reprisals against civilians as [arrests of accomplices of the AFU](#). The Kremlin has announced Putin’s [participation](#) in celebrations to mark “the reunion of Crimea with Russia”. The Crimean authorities have [said](#) that “the integration of the new regions” into Russia can take up to five years. On 7 March, Putin [met with](#) the head of the occupation administration of the occupied territories of the Zaporizhzhia oblast. Among other things, Putin spoke about the launch of a military corps consisting of the citizens of the Zaporizhzhia oblast. Such a corps is presented as a “battalion of volunteers”. It has also been announced that these “volunteers” are taking a polygraph. On 19 March Putin [took a trip](#) to occupied Mariupol. The main narrative promoted by the media was [peace and recovery of the city](#). The Russian media have announced the construction of roads and objects of infrastructure in Mariupol. On the eve of his trip Putin visited Sevastopol to congratulate [“the citizens of Crimea on their reunion with Russia”](#). Messages are circulating about ever more (190.000) Ukrainian citizens, who live in the newly occupied territories of the Zaporizhzhia oblast, [acquiring](#) Russian citizenship. More and more narratives are being circulated about the integration of the “new regions” (occupied territories of

Ukraine) into Russia and its political life. According to Russian data, 56.000 residents of the so-called Donetsk People's Republics have [joined](#) the "United Russia" Party. According to some messages, Putin was [setting up](#) "courts" in the territories of the so-called Luhansk People's Republics and the Kherson oblast on 3 April.

- **"China and Russia"**. In March Russia emphasized Moscow's strategic relationship with China as well as the two countries' mutual position regarding the response to Western threats. A number of narratives and messages covered the visit of Xi Jinping to Russia. The visit was referred to as "[the event of the year](#)" that defines the strategic agenda, offering an alternative to western hegemony. At the same time, Putin's official media resources were at times reserved in [informing](#) the public about the results of the visit, without providing any further details. Russian official narratives talk about a geopolitical partnership between Russian and China, claiming that the two countries counter "the hegemony of the USA". According to Nikolai [Patrushev](#), Head of Russia's Security Council, Russia is preventing "the USA from expanding into China". Moscow is spreading [information](#) about deepening economic and [interregional](#) cooperation with China. Dmitry [Peskov](#) described the meeting between Putin and Xi Jinping as the meeting of two people of "[good will](#)". According to the Russian [official narrative](#), China will fully support Putin during the next presidential campaign. The official Russian media is [spreading](#) "opinion pieces" about the future of Russia-China cooperation. It is claimed that China is aware of an imminent conflict with the West. Moscow [believes](#) that the USA is inferior to China in terms of technologies. Sergei Shoigu [has claimed](#) that Russia-China cooperation is a bulwark of stability in the world. Patriarch Kirill [congratulated](#) Xi Jinping on his reelection, while also raving about the "orthodox community of China" and its glorious past. The negotiation agenda between Russia and China regarding "Chinese peace initiatives" has been [announced](#).
- **Western threat to Russian security**. Russia is spreading anti-American and anti-western narratives while also issuing threats targeting western countries. The Kremlin insists that the USA must negotiate with Russia lest "[the Russian army should reach Poland](#)", since the Ukrainian army is losing a significant amount of manpower. Russian official media claim that such ideas have been expressed by former US military men. Moscow is also promoting [anti-Polish](#) narratives. According to Russia, Poland is [intent on](#) entering the war against Russia. The Kremlin believes that Poland is being militarized. Some Russian propaganda materials refer to the European Union as "Euroreich" that encroaches on the sovereignty of independent countries. Russia is also criticizing Ukraine's European integration. Russian official media predict an imminent collapse of the EU, its [loss of trust](#) and internal political disagreements.  
Nikolai Patrushev [has said](#) that NATO is a party to the war in Ukraine and that it does not hide its main goal i.e., Russia's defeat and its further disintegration. Putin [beleives](#) that the West has crossed all "red and burgundy lines" by supplying Ukraine with weapons.  
In their analysis the Russian media claims that the West is fighting Russia until 'the last Ukrainian standing'. Narratives are circulating about western threats to Russia in the context of the visit of the



Chinese President. In his [article](#) for the Chinese People's Daily "Russia and China — a forward-looking partnership, Putin wrote about threats posed to Russia by NATO. The Russian media insist on the "crisis in Ukraine having being provoked by the West". In parallel, ahead of Xi Jinping's visit to Moscow, messages about western threats to Russia were circulating in Russia's official media outlets, along with stories about the USA striving to contain China by threatening "[a big war](#)". There were also numerous messages about the mutual "enemies" of Russia and China.

- **Split in the Western world over support for Ukraine. Criticizing EU countries for supplying weapons to Ukraine.** Against the backdrop of anti-western rhetoric in the Russian information space, the Russian media are actively spreading information about the lack of unity among western countries regarding their support for Ukraine and about these countries being tired of Ukraine amid the economic and social challenges. Moscow [claims](#) that unity among western countries is eroding in terms of support for Ukraine, adding that the upcoming presidential campaign in the USA may leave many questions unanswered. Anti-western narratives are being spread, particularly those regarding military aid to Ukraine. The Russian official media have welcomed the decision of Hungary to refuse to purchase arms for Ukraine "[in order to keep clear of this war](#)" (as put by Péter Szijjártó).
- **About the economic growth in Russia.** The Russian media continues to spread narratives about the economic development of Russia and the futile attempts undertaken by the West to destroy the Russian economy through unjustified sanctions. On 16 March, Putin [spoke](#) about the growth of the Russian business sector at the Congress of Entrepreneurs of Russia thanks to the policies pursued by the Russian government and himself.
- **Threatening to use of nuclear weapons to "protect itself".** Russian officials (Dmitry [Medvedev](#)) have again used the rhetoric about the possible use of nuclear weapons in the event that Ukraine decides to liberate Crimea. Dmitry Peskov has spoken about a "preventive strike" in retaliation for [the aggressive developments regarding Russia](#), which is a new concept of Russia's foreign policy. Russian official narratives interpret the provision of depleted-uranium shells for Ukraine as something that is nearly tantamount to Kyiv violating the agreement on non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman, Maria [Zakharova](#) has admitted that there is a danger of "Ukraine possibly using nuclear weapons". On 21 March, Putin [said](#) that "if the West begins to use weapons with a nuclear component Russia will be forced to react as it will lead to a further wave of escalation not only in Ukraine but also within the context of a larger geopolitical confrontation. Later Putin [spoke](#) about the environmental risks for civilians connected with the use of nuclear weapons. Putin [has justified](#) his decision to station nuclear weapons in Belarus, calling it a "necessary step", a "[natural and symmetric response](#)", which has been triggered by the West's actions in Ukraine.