

March 9th

A brief overview of the situation

- 1. DEVELOPMENTS IN THE CONFLICT.** The main threat remains the one posed by Russian airstrikes, particularly on towns located on the Ukrainian-Russian border. Shelling of a children's hospital in Mariupol and other civilian targets represent war crimes. The Russian forces are amassing new troops in Crimea in order to conduct their rotation, which is being witnessed by the local population. On the evening of March 8, leaflets were circulating in Berdyansk on the organization of a referendum on a union between Ukraine and Russia. **This is a sign that Russia is taking steps to integrate more territories based on the 'LDPR' pattern**, which implies issuing passports, holding 'referendums', controlling TV towers and deploying police forces. Around 400 participants to peaceful demonstrations have been detained in Kherson alone. However, it remains too early to envisage a possible annexation of new territories by the RF based on the 'Crimean' model. In the North of Ukraine there are no signs of significant progress of the Russian forces. In the Kharkiv oblast, the Ukrainian army managed to repel Russian forces to the border. For the first time since the outbreak of the war, Russia officially acknowledged the presence of Russian conscript soldiers in Ukraine. Prior to that, Russia was claiming that only professional soldiers were engaged in the fighting. The considerable losses forced them to partially disclose some information.
- 2. ENVIRONMENT.** On March 9, as a result of the actions undertaken by the Russian forces, the Chernobyl nuclear power plant has been cut off from electricity. The plant is being controlled by Russian forces, which many fear would lead to incalculable consequences. During the day the plant was connected to back-up generators. However, it is essential to conduct repair works within the next 48 hours in order to avert a breakdown. Aside from the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, the neighboring town of Slavutych has also been disconnected from electricity. The city of Enerhodar is being controlled by Russian forces who have also seized the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Station, still holding hostage the workers of the station.
- 3. NEGOTIATIONS.** On the eve of the meeting between the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine and Russia in Antalya, Russian troops are attempting to gain maximal military results, particularly in the South of Ukraine by seizing Mariupol and taking control of the entire coast of the Azov Sea. To provide humanitarian 'green' corridors, Ukrainian troops have demined some of the routes around Mariupol. Should there be no considerable concessions from Ukraine, it is expected that Russia would go for another wave of escalation. Such an escalation would be difficult for Ukraine to withstand without a 'no-fly' zone. **Should the Ukrainian government fail to clearly communicate its agenda, it could lead to tensions within the Ukrainian society** as the government would then start to be accused of its intention to surrender.
- 4. HUMANITARIAN DIMENSION.** The most important event of the day was the opening of 'green corridors' in 6 directions: 1) Enerhodar — Zaporizhzhia; 2) Sumy — Poltava; 3) Mariupol — Zaporizhzhia; 4) Volnovakha - Pokrovsk; 5) Izyum — Lozova; 6) Vorzel, Bucha, Borodyanka, Irpin, Hostomel - Kyiv. The majority of these towns have been subject to heavy shelling for nearly two weeks, with no opportunities for civilians to leave and instead forced to take shelter. Despite this, some civilians tried to evacuate and were caught under fire and shelling. Reports emerged from civilians who left Borodyanka, Irpin and other occupied towns in the Kyiv oblast, about heinous crimes committed by Russian soldiers known as the 'Kadyrovtsy'. In Mariupol, a bomb has symbolically been dropped on the 'peace street'. **On March 9, as a result of an air strike, a maternity and children's hospital were destroyed. According to preliminary estimations conducted by the Mariupol City Council, 1300 citizens of Mariupol alone have died since the start of the Russian invasion.** This

number is in stark contrast to the data provided by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, who, as of 12am, March 9, has registered 1424 civilian casualties across the entire country with 516 dead and 908 wounded. If the data from Mariupol is confirmed, it could lead to other cities disclosing data on victims, particularly the ones that are being subjected to heavy shelling, such as Kharkiv, Chernihiv, Sumy and Izyum.

5. The Ukrainian cities that are not subject to shelling are attempting to function in the context of martial law. The Ukrainian government is trying to protect historic sites. **Lviv and other cities of western Ukraine are teeming with displaced people.** There is already a shortage of housing, food, etc. The infrastructure does not have the capacity to deal with a sudden influx of displaced people.
6. **Not only do ethnic Ukrainians suffer from shelling, but also foreign citizens living in Ukraine and other ethnic communities residing in the country.** Several Greek settlements around Mariupol have been destroyed, while no information regarding their residents has been released. Foreign students (mostly from Africa) cannot be evacuated from Ukraine, especially those who do not have any IDs and therefore are being denied entry to EU countries. The situation is even more complex for the citizens of those countries that do not have embassies in Ukraine.
7. According to Ukrainian lawyers, it is expected that Russia will be excluded from the European Commission for Democracy through Law (the Venice Commission) on March 10.
8. **INFORMATION DIMENSION.** The RF is spreading narratives according to which the goal of the special operation was not regime change in Ukraine. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the RF stated that it is intent on signing 'security guarantees' with the legitimate Ukrainian government. It is worth mentioning that panic and general confusion are spreading across the RF and Crimea regarding the soaring prices on alimentary and other goods. Social media abound with photos of empty shelves in supermarkets. At the same time, official messages issued by the Russian government focus on the narrative according to which Russia is quickly adapting to the sanctions, as it was the case in Crimea in 2014. The message is that the overall situation is improving, and Russia can rely on itself only. In Crimea, the local population observe a growing number of the military and their rotations. For example, the schools in Dzhankoi (a town close to the administrative border of the peninsula) are shut down and soldiers quartered there. Russian media continue to discredit Ukrainian military, refuting any crimes against peaceful citizens and claiming there are 'expensive mercenaries from the West' fighting in Ukraine. **Repressive measures are still being taken against those who do not support the war. For instance, according to some information, a criminal case (part 1 of the article 354 of the Criminal Code of the RF, - justification of Nazism) has been initiated which differs from previous cases that remained administrative ones.** Narratives of a full support of the 'special military operation' continue to be spread among the society, including with addresses from former military figures and artists speaking in support of the actions taken by the Russian government in Ukraine.