

**September 1st - September 18th, 2023
Ukraine Situation Report**

CONFLICT DEVELOPMENTS

- **The Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) continue their counteroffensive in several directions, following the liberation of several settlements.** For example, near Bakhmut the Ukrainian army has brought the settlements of Klishchiivka and Andriivka under their control, having destroyed the [72nd brigade](#) of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (AFRF), including its command. This enables the AFU to reach the city of Bakhmut and either encircle or push back the Russian units. Hostilities in the village of [Opytne](#) near Avdiivka are underway. The AFU has also entered the settlements of Stroivka and Topoli in the Kharkiv province that were previously located in the grey zone. At the end of August, the Ukrainian army liberated the village of [Urozhayne](#) in Donetsk province and the village of [Robotyne](#) in Zaporizhzhia province, after breaking through the first line of defense of the AFRF. Due to a strike at the Russian army staff located in the rear, the command of the [31st paratrooper brigade](#) of the AFRF was destroyed. The AFU [broke through](#) the first line of Russia's defenses close to Zaporizhzhia, the construction of which took Russians 60% of their time.
- **Constant confrontation in the Black Sea and in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea.** For example, according to some data, in August-September, Russia's most modern air defense systems, the C-400, were destroyed. This helped Ukrainian drones hit important targets/objects in Crimea. Furthermore, on the night of 13 September a large landing ship (Minsk) and a submarine (Rostov-on-Don) were [destroyed](#). A few other vessels belonging to the Russian Black Sea Fleet were also damaged. On 11 September, subunits of the Defence Intelligence of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine [brought](#) the so-called "Boyko towers" under their control. These are gas- and oil-producing platforms located close to Crimea's shore in the Black Sea. This significantly helped to limit Russian control of the Black Sea.
- According to the Ukrainian government, as of 18 September, total Russian losses amount to almost 273.000 soldiers killed. At the same time, in some areas of the front, the AFRF continues to attack Ukrainian positions in the direction of Kupyansk. However, after their defeat near Klishchiivka and Andriivka, the pace of Russia's advance [slowed](#).
- **The Russian army continues to attack Ukrainian cities with missiles and drones located far from the front line. Russia also launches artillery and air attacks at Ukrainian cities situated along the front line.** [Kyiv](#) (on 30 August one of the heaviest attacks on the Ukrainian capital took place), [Kherson](#), [Kharkiv](#), [Beryslav](#), [Kryvyi Rih](#) (60 people were affected by shelling on 8 September alone), [Kupyansk](#), [Kostyantynivka](#) (16 people were killed on 6 September with 30 injured), [Kramatorsk](#), [Avdiivka](#), [Nikopol](#), and other settlements were subjected to attacks, as well as settlements of the Chernihiv, Kharkiv and Sumy provinces located close to the Russian border. A considerable number of attacks targeted agricultural objects and seaports through which Ukrainian grain is exported. During the attacks, Russian drones landed on the territory of [Romania several times](#). The highest

intensity of shelling was registered in August. For example, following a missile attack at [Chernihiv's](#) center on 19 August, 7 people were killed, with 140 injured.

- On 29 August, the bodies of 84 Ukrainian soldiers were [brought back](#) to Ukraine. On 15 September, a further 51 [bodies](#) were returned. In total, the bodies of 1.832 Ukrainian soldiers have been returned. In August, Ukraine managed to return 5 of its seriously injured POWs from [Russian captivity](#), while another 22 POWs were brought back during a further [exchange](#).

POLITICAL DIMENSIONS

- **Over 100 public organizations have signed a statement regarding the impossibility of holding elections during the active phase of the war, calling on international partners to increase support for Ukraine to speed up Ukraine's victory which will allow democratic elections to take place.** The [statement](#) explains why holding elections during the active phase of the war is dangerous. Its authors believe that elections and a full-scale war are incompatible since elections may lead to the loss of legitimacy of elected bodies. For now, it is difficult to ensure the fully-fledged participation in elections of the military and Ukrainian citizens living abroad. Moreover, in a time of martial law, political competition is absent. It would be quite challenging to reach a result that will be accepted by both those who win and lose the elections.
- **The threat of transport and logistics isolation of Ukraine and the crisis of solidarity in the EU. Most EU countries back the decision of the European Commission on the export of Ukrainian grain.** On 15 September, the European Commission (having previously analyzed data on the impact of the export of 4 categories of agricultural produce on the EU market) concluded that it would not prolong the [ban on the export of grain](#) from Ukraine to Hungary, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria and Slovakia. Immediately afterwards Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia announced their unilateral withdrawal from the coordination platform of the European Commission on Ukrainian grain. As a result, Ukraine will [sue](#) Poland, Hungary and Slovakia. The situation between the European Commission, Ukraine and the threesome has reached an impasse. It remains to be seen how it will be resolved.
- **Ukraine's prime minister, Denys Shmyhal, has outlined seven main [areas](#) for of the government's work during a press conference he gave on 15 September:** 1) Security; 2) Defense and weapons; 3) Energy; 4) Quick recovery; 5) Logistics; 6) Economy; 7) Macro-financial stability.
- **In the first weeks of September several public figures were placed under arrest.** On 2 September, the businessman Ihor Kolomoyskiy was charged by the Security Service of Ukraine, the Bureau for Economic Security and the Prosecutor's General Office with a number of economic crimes. He was placed under arrest. On 15 September, Nestor Shufrych, an ex-MP, was arrested on suspicion of treason. Experts believe that the goal of these arrests is to demonstrate the government's commitment to fighting oligarchs and corrupted officials.
- **On 7 September, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy officially presented the newly appointed [Minister of Defense](#), Rustem Umierov, to the Ministry and the General Staff of the AFU.** Oleksii Reznikov and his [deputies](#) were fired on the grounds of recurrent corruption scandals. However, some experts claim the dismissals were related to an internal political fight within the government's

team. **At the same time, it is crucial that the resignation of the Minister of Defense and his deputies, as well as the changes in the Ministry during war, do not pose a threat to the continuity of management.**

- According to the Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine, Oleksii Danilov, a new round of [mobilisation](#) to the AFU could be on the cards. At the same time a [bill](#) was submitted to the Ukrainian parliament regarding the electronic register of those eligible for draft, which is aimed at optimizing the draft campaign.
- **Ukraine is trying to [avoid](#) a transport and logistics isolation.** Two civilian vessels agreed to pass through a temporary corridor to Ukrainian ports to load agricultural products. This was [announced](#) by Oleksandr Kubrakov, Deputy Prime Minister for Ukraine's recovery. After Russia began blocking the Black Sea grain initiative, Ukraine opened [new temporary routes](#) for civilian vessels, having secured their control thanks to successful operations in the Black Sea and Crimea. Prior to this, ships would go through the corridor only after leaving from Ukrainian ports. **The support offered by Ukraine's western allies regarding the liberation of parts of the Black Sea may help lift the navigation blockade of the Sea, expand Ukraine's export opportunities and revitalize grain export, despite Russia's withdrawal from the grain deal.**

HUMANITARIAN DIMENSIONS

- According to the official information provided by juvenile prosecutors, 504 children have been killed, with over 1.123 injured with various degrees of severity. 19.546 children are believed to have been deported. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has [confirmed](#) the death of over 9.600 civilians and injuries sustained by 17.535 civilians in Ukraine. From 1-10 September, 55 cases of death and 237 cases of injuries [were documented](#).
- According to [research](#) conducted by the State Service for the Quality of Education of Ukraine, during the education year 2022-2023, 30% of students did not have constant access to education amid war. The number was as high as 40% in South Ukraine. Since 1 September, education has been taking place in the [offline format](#) in those schools that have a well-protected shelter. According to Ukraine's Minister of Education, Oksen Lisovyi, currently 76% of education facilities have a [shelter](#).
- 3.770 education facilities have been subjected to bombardment and shelling. 363 of them have been entirely destroyed. Moreover, [823 objects](#) of cultural heritage have been damaged in the wake of Russian aggression towards Ukraine.
- A survey conducted by [Info Sapiens](#), revealed that the vast majority of Ukrainians (63%), are planning to return to Ukraine. Those least inclined to return are students in foreign education facilities (they are 68% less inclined than those respondents who are not students) as well as unemployed Ukrainians actively looking for a job (they are 45% less inclined than those who are neither working nor searching for a job). The majority of Ukrainian refugees live in Germany (27%) and Poland (24%). As of now, almost [5 million citizens](#) are registered in Ukraine internally displaced people. They lost (or were forced to abandon) their homes due to Russian aggression.

- According to the Minister of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Ukraine, Ruslan Strilets, the damage incurred by the Russian invasion to the environment amounts to [2 trillion UAH](#). This figure does not include the damage caused by Russia's destruction of the Kakhovka Dam. The destruction of the dam [led](#) to Ukraine losing the volume of water that is usually continue over a two-year period.
- Since Russia's withdrawal from the "grain agreement", [118 attacks](#) have been carried out on Ukrainian ports, while Russian missiles and drones have destroyed [280.000 tons](#) of Ukrainian grain. On 15 September, the European Commission [did not extend](#) (despite pleas from the EE countries neighboring Ukraine) limitations on the import of Ukrainian grain, corn, rapeseed and sunflowers to five EU countries neighboring Ukraine. Ukraine has [filed a lawsuit](#) at the World Trade Organization (WTO) against Poland, Slovakia and Hungary, which subsequently unilaterally banned the import of Ukrainian agricultural produce.
- [The New York Times has reported](#) the claims made by the Ukrainian army that the Russian occupiers are spraying inflammable substances over the territories where mine fields are located. While trying to demine these fields, Russia uses drones to drop grenades, which causes large-scale fires and explosions. Thus, the Russian military is trying to halt the advance of the AFU. Apart from that, Russia is throwing units composed of inmates into problematic spots along the frontline to regain lost positions. For example, from Mariupol to the territory near Ivchenkove (Zaporizhzhia province) the Russians [have sent](#) around 200 former inmates with the aim of creating assault units to regain Robotyne. Also, on 18 September, the Russian army used drones to attack crowds of people in Beryslav, in the Kherson province. Four local citizens were wounded.
- Temporary corridors for the passage of trade vessels heading to or from Ukraine's ports in the Black Sea have been created. In August, 5 vessels [used](#) the corridor. Along the entire corridor the risk of a military confrontation or an explosion due to Russian mines remains serious. Ukraine continues to foster cooperation with NATO member states in the field of the demining of the Black Sea.

INFORMATION WARFARE DIMENSIONS

- Disinformation continues to be spread by Russia's top officials regarding Russian's increasingly favourable economic situation. For example, it is claimed that the Russian economy is growing despite western sanctions, while the country's GDP is increasing. Russian president, Vladimir Putin, [said](#) that the recovery of the Russian economy is complete and the situation turned out to be better than forecasts predicted. According to Putin, Russia has endured unprecedented external pressure as well as pressure from sanctions. Putin claims that Russia's GDP has reached 2021 levels and it is now important to create the conditions for further stable and sustainable development. Narratives about the [development](#) of Russian regions, in particular those in the Far East, are being spread by Putin.
- **Unique Russian values.** Official media continue to [spread](#) narratives about Russia's unique traditional values, in particular, family values in contrast to the "LGBTQ propaganda" of the West. At

- the same time, the popularity of Soviet totalitarian leaders is explained by the fact that the West has been reprimanding Russians since the USSR's collapse, and Russians are "fed up with repenting".
- **Glorification of the participants of the so-called "special military operation" (SMO).** On 13 September, Putin [said](#) that Russia had plenty of contract soldiers who understand that they may die for the sake of "defending Russia". He also said that in 2022, 300.000 contract soldiers joined the army. [Social](#) benefits continue to be offered to the participants of the SMO. Some of the participants have received accolades (in [Kabardino-Balkaria](#) and other regions).
 - **The so-called elections in the temporarily occupied territories.** On 8-10 October the so-called local elections in the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson provinces were held. The Russian Election Commission has not announced the turnout. Extraterritorial polling stations were opened in Crimea, Sevastopol, and other regions. 21 stations were opened in Crimea alone. The "United Russia" party won with a landslide in the Kherson province after 100 percent of votes were processed. In the so-called elections, 65.36% of voters from Kherson oblast participated. At the same time, **the exact number of 100% voters is unknown.** The number of voters in the temporarily occupied territories [has not been announced](#) by Russia. Nor is this information available on official websites of the Russian state bodies responsible for the organization of the election. The turnout at the elections of the People's Council of the Luhansk People's Republic and the local governance bodies of the first convocation stood at 72.53%. In the elections of the Legislative Assembly of the first convocation in Zaporizhzhia oblast 68.11% of voters participated. The turnout at the elections to the Kherson Oblast Duma was 65.14%. In the Donetsk People's Republic the turnout at the elections of the MPs to the People's Council was 76.41%.
 - **Russia is fighting the West, the USA, and NATO.** Russia continues to promote messages claiming that Russia is fighting against the West and USA. Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov has [said](#) that the USA are "managing the war against Russia in Ukraine and that Ukraine has been prepared by the USA for many years to lead a fight to inflict defeat on Russia". Russia systematically spreads narratives [against](#) the EU in official propagandist media, particularly highlighting the cooperation between Russia and North Korea. Russia claims that the EU fails to adequately assess Russia's policies in this regard. Moscow believes that "assets" of Russians in EU countries and elsewhere are under pressure. Russia speaks about the [impoverishment](#) in the [EU](#) due to the sanctions placed on Russia and support for Ukraine, which affects the lives of ordinary EU citizens. Moscow asserts that Japan is being militarized by the USA against Russia. The Russian media use the [term](#) of "a second Ukraine", a country that is posed against Russia on Russian borders. Traditionally, Russia [claims](#) that NATO is fighting against Russia in Ukraine and being defeated by the strong Russian army. The Russian media covered [the visit](#) of the North Korean leader and his negotiations with Putin extensively.
 - **Russia cannot lose.** Messages appear in official Russian sources, apparently written by "western analysts", who [claim](#) that Russia is successfully containing Ukraine and that Russia cannot lose. These messages assert that Ukraine will not negotiate "on Moscow terms", and that "the Russian leader" is containing the escalation lest the conflict should continue to spread.

- **Peace negotiations.** Overall, the Russian rhetoric (furthered by Kremlin Spokesman, Dmitry Peskov) remains the same — Russia sees no reasons to conduct peace talks. At the same time, while delivering a speech at the plenary session of the East Economic [Forum](#), Putin [called](#) on the USA to influence Zelenskyy so that he abolishes his decree on the ban of conducting negotiations with Russia.
- **Ukraine as a corrupted country. The draft of Russian speakers.** Narratives are being spread that discredit the Ukrainian government (the “Kyiv regime”, as official Russian information sources refer to it). The narratives revolve around corruption, the [attempts](#) of the government to practically eradicate “Russian speakers” by calling them up to the AFU. [Narratives](#) are being spread about the corruption at the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, about the connections of the newly appointed minister, Rustam Umierov, to oligarchs (Akhmetov) and about the candidacy of Umierov being approved by the USA.
- **Discrediting the Ukrainian army. “The counteroffensive of the AFU has failed”.** Russia constantly talks about the [failure](#) of Ukraine’s counteroffensive, claiming that Russia is in full control of the situation on the battlefield (Defence Minister, Sergei Shoigu). Russia is also sharing figures of Ukrainian manpower losses during the counteroffensive. This was not previously the case. Putin has [announced](#) data that claims Ukraine has sustained huge losses during its counteroffensive – 71.500 thousand soldiers and 543 tanks. A week earlier, Shoigu [said](#) Ukrainians had lost 66.000 soldiers. Data is being persistently spread about the [destruction](#) of Ukrainian equipment (drones) because of shelling in Kherson province. However, Russia never mentions Russian losses. Messages are being [spread](#) about the AFU “going on the defensive in the wake of its stalled counteroffensive”.
- **“About the victories and the successes of the Russian army, and the losses of the AFU”.** Traditionally, the Russian propaganda space is full of [messages](#) about the achievements of the Russian army in its so-called SMO. For example, attacks on Ukraine’s grain infrastructure in southern Odesa province are referred to as “group strikes on Ukraine’s port infrastructure, the sites of sea drone production, ammunition and weapons depots, including those delivered from the West”. Russia spreads information about the critical losses sustained by the AFU in terms of western equipment ([Leopard tanks](#)). Only [limited](#) information has been spread about the AFU attack on Sevastopol on 13 September. According to Russia, two ships were damaged. Nevertheless, information about “Ukrainian boats” and “sea drones” being [hit](#) by the AFU is being spread.