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Topics:

- Ukraine – European Union
- Foreign and Defense Policy of Ukraine
- The course of the Russian-Ukrainian war



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- *THEME ANALYSIS: Escalation of hybrid war between EU and Russia: how it will affect Ukraine*



*Photo: Pro-Russian rally in Germany
Source: Reuters*

Along with military aggression against Ukraine, the Russian Federation continues hybrid aggression against Ukraine's European partners. Non-military methods are an important foreign policy tool, which the Russians used during the Soviet Union and keep using today. In particular, this includes energy blackmail, active measures in EU countries, murders of Russian oppositionists and citizens of EU countries in Europe, informational influence, etc.

After February 24, the European Union introduced a number of measures that reduced the Kremlin's ability to influence the governments and populations of member countries, but has not completely eliminated them. This becomes obvious with the approach of winter, when Russia is increasing the scale of hybrid influence on the European Union.

Russia's main lever of influence over the EU is energy. As of April 2021, 45% of gas consumed by EU countries was imported from Russia. In April 2022, this indicator was already 31%.¹ The share has decreased, however, dependence still remains. Russia uses this, artificially reduces the supply of gas, stops pumping gas pipelines. ***The main goal of the Russians is to force Ukraine's partners to reduce their support, as well as to ease the sanctions pressure on Moscow.*** Due to the increase in energy prices and inflation, European

¹ Elliot Smith, Europe's plans to replace Russian gas are deemed 'wildly optimistic' — and could hammer its 1 economy, 29.06.2022
URL: <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/06/29/europes-plans-to-replace-russian-gas-are-deemed-wildly-optimistic>

enterprises are at risk of bankruptcy, the share of such firms has increased from 10 to 17%. The more Europeans lose their sources of income, under conditions of rising prices and a general decline in living standards, the more favorable the ground will be for inciting the population to protests against the policies of the current governments. And although the EU countries have limited informational influence, in particular, by banning the broadcasting of a number of propagandistic Russian state TV channels, such as "Sputnik", "Russia Today", "Россия РТР"/"РТР Planet", "Россия 24"/"Russia24", "TV Center International", the Russian Federation still finds opportunities to spread anti-Ukrainian propaganda and attempts to convince Europeans that the economic decline is not the result of Russian aggression, but the result of support for Ukraine.

False statements by pro-Russian experts aimed at reducing aid to Ukraine are still sometimes heard on the world's leading media, as in the United States, for example, on Fox News, or the German Deutsche Welle. Together with the activation of the fifth column in the EU states, this can lead to negative consequences. It is worth mentioning rather large-scale pro-Russian rallies in Cologne and Prague. At a demonstration in the Czech Republic, participants, in particular, demanded the resignation of the government due to rising prices for electricity, oil and gas. So far, such cases are limited and will not change the decision to support Ukraine. However, in winter, European countries may face more destabilization, which may affect both the position of the current governments and their policy towards Ukraine. Therefore, the economic stability of European states is one of the main factors determining the readiness of European countries to continue resisting Russia. Also, the EU states, together with Ukraine, must continue the line of protecting their information space. In addition to the adoption of relevant legal norms, an important factor is the level of representation of pro-Ukrainian experts on rating political and news programs.

The Kremlin has been working for years to create pro-Russian groups within European countries: funding political parties, various experts, hiring former high-ranking officials to senior positions in oil and gas companies. According to CNN, Russia has secretly transferred more than \$300 million since 2014 and planned to secretly transfer at least hundreds of million more to foreign political parties, officials and politicians in more than two dozen countries and four continents.² In addition to officials, **Russia has a high level of support among the large Russian diaspora.** Unlike other peoples, Russians hardly assimilate, most of them, after moving to a new country, retain the traditional way of life and mentality, many of them do not even learn the language of the host country and communicate in Russian in the overwhelming majority with the same migrants. After the full-scale invasion, ***the majority of Russians supported military aggression, and there are numerous recorded cases on the Internet of Russians assaulting Ukrainians in Europe.***

High-ranking EU officials, with some delay, changed their attitude towards Russians on their territory and also began to make decisions to limit the travel of Russian tourists and to take measures against the actions and statements of ethnic Russians, related to the justification of Russian aggression. The most active in this regard were the countries of

² Kylie Atwood, Michael Conte and Devan Cole, Russia has spent over \$300 million on influencing foreign elections since 2014, US officials say, 13.09.2022, URL: <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/09/13/politics/russia-foreign-elections-influence/index.html>

Eastern Europe, which, together with Ukraine, promoted the idea of introducing restrictions on Russians within the EU. The Council of the European Union has already adopted a decision that completely suspends the Agreement on simplification of the visa regime between the EU and Russia. Also, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Denmark, Belgium, and the Netherlands no longer accept documents for tourist visas from Russians. Europe no longer has illusions about Russia and its citizens and therefore adopts adequate decisions that will strengthen the ability of member states to counter hybrid threats.

In the energy sector, there is a complex work of the EU in the direction of stabilizing the economy in order to reduce the negative impact of Russian aggression and achieve previously defined recovery goals. This applies to support programs, issues of creation, modernization of energy infrastructure, diversification of suppliers, interstate mutual assistance, energy saving measures and financial measures. This process began as early as May 18, when the European Commission presented a plan for further reduction of dependence on energy carriers from the Russian Federation under the name REPowerEU. The European Commission then instructed member states to make efforts to reduce total energy consumption by 15% from August 1, 2022 to March 31, 2023. Currently, member states are filling reserves and adapting the gas transportation system to the possibility of reverse supply between EU members, deconserving coal-fired power plants, etc. With a high probability, the European Union will face a complete shutdown of Russian gas this winter, but it will be able to overcome this period, given the well-thought-out comprehensive preparation.

In the information space, the EU has blocked Russian propaganda channels. Russian propaganda is restricted, while rassistis from among the Russian diaspora and tourists are prosecuted, at least in Eastern European countries. However, the Russian Federation still has a voice and the ability to spread its own narratives in the information field, so the European Union remains vulnerable, and the potential of the 5th column in the EU is significant. ***The further course of the war largely depends on the economic stability of the EU countries, which will affect their willingness to continue supporting Ukraine in the matter of sanctions policy, financial and military aid.*** Europe is paying a high price for helping Ukraine. However, Ukraine also pays a high price - with the lives of its citizens. At the same time, it is worth remembering that the price of insufficient assistance can be even higher. Any pauses in hostilities will be used to restore forces for further aggression against Ukraine and partner countries, therefore the only strategy for the West should be Ukraine's victory in the war and the restoration of its internationally recognized borders.

- *THEME ANALYSIS: The coming of the third phase of the Russian-Ukrainian war or its radical turn?*



*Photo: Volodymyr Zelenskyy visiting Kharkiv region
Source: Office of the President of Ukraine*

The counteroffensive of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in the Kharkiv region proved to the whole world that Ukraine can and will return the occupied territories, despite the skepticism that was heard in many media. While most officials and analysts were in favor of supporting Ukraine, the assessments of experts incompetent in military science could be seen in well-known and authoritative publications such as The New York Times, Foreign Affairs or Foreign Policy.

In their publications, they argued the inexpediency of military assistance to Ukraine, often justifying this by the inability of the Armed Forces of Ukraine to achieve success in offensive operations and emphasized the need to start negotiations with the Russian Federation on its terms as soon as possible. In response, the Armed Forces of Ukraine proved in practice that with sufficient support, Russia would be kicked out of Ukraine. However, as for now, it is too early to say that in the future Ukraine will certainly receive the level of support that would be sufficient to achieve a military victory over the aggressor and return the territories within the internationally recognized border as of August 24, 1991.

The doubts and assessment of the so-called experts are not a key factor in determining the further course of the Russian-Ukrainian war, but the hesitation of international leaders, unfortunately, is such a factor. At present, their ardent desire to end the armed confrontation between Ukraine and Russia through negotiations as soon as possible is observed, even despite the successes of Ukrainian troops in the Kharkiv and Kherson regions.

As the conflict progressed, **Recep Erdogan** received more and more criticism from Ukrainians. His unequivocal support for Ukraine at the beginning of the full-scale invasion has changed to the traditional ambiguity: on the one hand, Turkey continues military aid to Ukraine, on the other hand, it has become a haven for Russian capital, continues economic cooperation with Moscow, and occasionally accuses the West of Russian aggression. The issue of the Russian-Ukrainian war has become an internal political issue for Erdogan, and therefore mediation initiatives are not aimed at supporting Ukraine, but at strengthening his authority among the population and on the international arena. After the meeting with Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Lviv, Recep Erdogan seems to have realized that Ukraine does not need mediators, but allies, and will not go to negotiations with the Russian Federation. That is why the Turkish president has at least put peace mediation proposals on hold. Another potential "mediator" is **Emmanuel Macron**, a supporter of the diplomatic approach, which, however, has not been working for longer than the full-scale aggression of the Russian Federation. Even before February 24, the French president spent hours on the phone with Vladimir Putin. The position of France has not changed the behavior of the Russian Federation. Attempts to further maintain communication between Paris and Moscow regarding a peaceful settlement proved futile and only cause distrust in Kyiv.

On September 11, the President of France held talks with Vladimir Putin. On September 13, Chancellor of Germany **Olaf Scholz** negotiated with the head of the Kremlin, and already on the 14th, Russia launched missile strikes on critical infrastructure in the city of Kryvyi Rih. In the current war, Russia has done everything possible to make the international community finally understand what the modern Russian Federation is and the fact that this state understands only force. However, some leaders are still vacillating between unquestioning support for Ukraine and the desire to end the war, even at the expense of concluding a hopeless truce.

And even **Antony Blinken**, a representative of a part of the American politicians who are in favor of increasing military assistance to Ukraine, unexpectedly visited Kyiv at the time when the Ukrainian Armed Forces broke through the front near Balakliya. The head of the State Department probably discussed the future plans of the Ukrainian leadership, and also probed the ground for possible negotiations between Ukraine and the Russian Federation. **The Biden administration is still hesitant to increase military support.** Ukraine has not yet received ATACMS missiles capable of striking 300 km, aircraft, modern tanks or MQ-9 Reaper drones. ***Thus, Russia maintains a military advantage as Joe Biden attempts to direct the course of the conflict for fear of escalation.*** For the lack of additional assistance in the form of modern technology, Ukraine pays every day with the lives of its citizens. Due to partners' hesitation, Ukraine's offensive remains limited and there are occasional calls for negotiations.

Considering that Russian officials started talking about negotiations, such a development of events would suit Russia, because the signing of a truce would fix the positions of the Russian Armed Forces on the territory of Ukraine and give time to adapt to the sanctions, partially restore military forces and time for diplomatic work. aimed at breaking up the coalition of Ukraine's partners.

This is well understood by the Ukrainian leadership, whose position remains unified and unequivocal. After the successful actions of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in the Kharkiv region, the main high-ranking officials of Ukraine responsible for foreign policy: the President, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Defense, gave interviews and speeches in which they expressed their intention to continue the fight until the entire territory of Ukraine is liberated. The Yermak-Rasmussen plan on security guarantees for Ukraine was also published, indicating the rejection of the possibility of fixing Ukraine in a gray zone with the imposition of a neutral status on the state.

That is, **the position of Ukraine has changed dramatically since the March talks with the Russian Federation.** Sooner or later, Ukraine will sign an agreement with Russia, but without a future military victory, the state will not be able to avoid limiting sovereignty and territorial concessions. "I believe that this winter is a turning point, and it can lead to a rapid de-occupation of Ukraine. We see them escaping in some directions. If we were a little stronger with weapons, we would de-occupy faster," Volodymyr Zelenskyy said at the YES forum. "Ukraine can't afford to stop," Zelenskyy said, it was his response to the leaders of some countries, whose names he did not specify. At the same time, the President of Ukraine understands the risks associated with winter. The main risk is the loss of European countries support, whose economies have suffered losses due to Russian aggression and sanctions.

Ukraine and its leadership are ready for a difficult winter. The question remains how prepared Europe and the US are. The SCO summit demonstrated that Vladimir Putin is losing influence and authority not only in the European direction, but also in the Eurasian one. Europe must use this and demonstrate its power. The success of the Armed Forces of Ukraine will not only allow Ukraine to restore its territorial integrity, but also demonstrate the strength of the West, both of Europe and the United States in the international arena. This success will rebalance Europe and will give opportunity to focus on economic renewal. Therefore, it is very important to ensure support for Ukraine over the next 6 months. If Ukraine and Europe can overcome the winter, Russia will not be able to continue the war either economically or on the battlefield.



Source: Army FM

■ *Changes at the front*

Ukraine has won the first two stages of the war, withstood the offensive at the beginning, stabilized the front and launched a counteroffensive in the Kharkiv and Kherson regions. Now the Ukrainian army is faced with the task of winning the last stage, which should end with the complete expulsion of the Russian army from the territory of Ukraine.

According to the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine Valery Zaluzhny, for the Ukrainian Armed Forces, the further situation will be a complex combination of the actual position of the line of contact, available resources and a set of combat-ready troops, and, obviously, finding the strategic initiative in the hands of the enemy. The only way to radically change the strategic situation, according to Zaluzhny, is to deliver several successive, and ideally, simultaneous counterattacks by the Ukrainian Armed Forces during the 2023 campaign. The main blow should fall on the "center of gravity" of the Russian army. Since there is no clear definition of the Russian center of gravity, the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine suggests that it could be Crimea.

The preparation of an offensive campaign in Crimea requires the creation of one or more operational (operational-strategic) groupings consisting of ten to twenty combined-arms brigades, depending on the plan and ambitions of the Ukrainian command. In the current situation, this can only be done by replacing the main weapons of existing brigades with modern ones, which are provided by Ukraine's partners. Separately, the need is emphasized to obtain from partners an additional number of missiles and ammunition, artillery systems,

missile systems, electronic warfare equipment, etc. All this will require the consolidation of efforts of all partner countries of Ukraine, a long time and large financial costs.

Valery Zaluzhny also emphasizes the disparity in the capabilities of Ukraine and the Russian Federation and notes that the center of gravity of the Russian Armed Forces should still be considered the ability to deliver pinpoint strikes on targets deep into the territory of Ukraine with impunity. Equipping and re-equipping the Armed Forces of Ukraine with weapons systems of the appropriate range, to reduce the disparity between the Armed Forces of the Ukraine and the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, can change the course of the war. An example of the effectiveness of strikes in the depth of Russian forces is strikes against Crimean air bases.

Thus, the success and effectiveness of the counter-offensive depends on a possible decision regarding a comprehensive approach to the re-equipment of artillery, missile forces, tactical aviation and the Naval Forces of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, reducing the disproportion in the means of defeat and conveying the nature of the war to the Russians - in the way that was applied in Crimea to make their feelings about the war sharper, more natural and quite tangible, despite the considerable distance to the targets.

■ *Military assistance*

In the first half of September, Ukraine has received the following weapons:

USA:

- 105-mm M927 high-explosive rocket shells for M119 howitzers
- M982 Excalibur artillery ammunition
- Repair and evacuation vehicles M984A4 HEMTT (the number of transferred vehicles is unknown)

Finland:

- A batch of military aid for the Defense Forces of Ukraine worth 8.3 million euros
- Sisu XA-180/185 armored personnel carriers (Quantity unknown)

Denmark:

- Military uniform and winter clothing

Norway:

- 160 laser-guided Hellfire missiles, launchers and guidance units
- Night vision devices

Spain:

- 75 pallets with 155-mm ammunition

Lithuania:

- 105-mm howitzers M101 (quantity not specified)

FRG:

- Counter-battery radar "COBRA"
- SPAAG "GEPARD" (5 units)

Lithuania:

- M113 armored personnel carriers (Quantity not specified)

Source: Mil.ua.

■ *Russia: internal and external challenges*

The Ukrainian counteroffensive in the Kharkiv region dealt a powerful blow to the morale of the Russian army and Russian propagandists. Against the background of the events, Foreign Minister Serhiy Lavrov said that Russia had not given up on negotiations with Ukraine. Kremlin spokesman Dmitriy Peskov, in turn, refused to comment on the counteroffensive of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and redirected journalists to the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation. However, the Ministry of Defense could not give a plausible explanation. The statement regarding the regrouping was criticized even by some Kremlin war correspondents, and on Russian television the military defeat was recognized. In contrast to the defeats near Kyiv and Snake Island, the Russians in the Kharkiv region could not leave the occupied territory in an organized manner. Instead, the occupying forces ran, leaving their positions in panic and dropping hundreds of pieces of equipment.

Therefore, this time the Kremlin could not pass off a military defeat as a "gesture of goodwill." Vladimir Putin's rhetoric was restrained: "We see activity both there and there (at the front - ed.). Well, the Kyiv authorities have announced that they have started and are conducting an active counter-offensive operation. Well, let's see how it ends" - the head of the Kremlin said. This time, Putin did not threaten Ukraine and its partners, after all there is no capacity for escalation, or a symmetrical response, except for the use of nuclear weapons, or terror of civilians in Russia. The weakness of the Kremlin dictator was felt both inside Russia and on the international arena. Therefore, a group of deputies from St. Petersburg appealed to the State Duma with a proposal to bring charges of treason against Putin, while local deputies from Moscow called on Vladimir Putin personally to withdraw the powers of the president of the Russian Federation.

Further military defeats of Russia will contribute to the increase of discontent within the state and the first alarm bells for the current Russian authorities may turn into a change of Putin's regime.