



# Briefing Notes Summary

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Ukraine – July to December 2023

31 December 2023

## 03 July 2023

### Development of the war effort

A Russian missile attack that hit a restaurant in Kramatorsk (Donetsk Oblast) on 27.06.23 killed 13 people, including several children, according to the latest information. About 60 others were injured. The restaurant was considered a popular meeting place for volunteers, foreign media workers and service personnel. On 28.03.23, the Ukrainian secret service and special police units arrested one person. According to President Zelenskyy this was a person who masterminded the preparation of the attack.

On 29.06.23, the army is said to have called on the population of the districts near the border in Sumy Oblast via Telegram to evacuate the area, because the Russian side was firing from missile launchers, with artillery and glide bombs on a daily basis. On the same day, the army had reported that it had pushed back Russian forces in the vicinity of the town of Bakhmut and had also achieved a slow advance in other sections of the front or consolidated positions it had won. According to Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, Russian air superiority and minefields are the biggest problems for the ongoing counter-offensive. Furthermore, according to Commander-in-Chief Valery Zaluzhnyi, the lack of fighter planes is slowing down the counter-offensive and results in a higher number of casualties. He called for patience with the counter-offensive to liberate the occupied territories.

On 02.07.23, for the first time in about two weeks, air strikes on Kiev resumed in the form of combat drones and cruise missiles, all of which, according to Ukrainian sources, were intercepted. However, falling debris damaged houses in the Kiev Oblast and injured one person. According to Ukrainian sources, Russian troops are also making advances near the towns of Avdiivka, Maryinka and Lyman (Donetsk Oblast). In Luhansk Oblast, Russian forces were advancing near the small town of Svatove. Deputy Defence Minister Hanna Maliar called the overall situation on the eastern front complicated.

### Consequence after the failed Wagner revolt

After the announcement that mercenaries of the "Wagner Group" were to be accepted in Belarus after the failed uprising and march on Moscow on 24.06.23 (cf. BN of 26.06.23), the Ukrainian leadership announced on 30.06.23 that it would strengthen the protection of the border with Belarus.

## 10 July 2023

### General development of warfare

According to media reports based on Ukrainian information, the towns of Lyman, Bakhmut, Avdiivka and Mariinka in the east of the country remain the main targets of Russian attacks. Further attacks targeted the area near Bakhmut, while the Ukrainian side continued its offensives north and south of the city. In the southern oblasts of Zaporizhzhia and Kherson, Russian troops are on the defensive, according to this information. In addition, Russia flew air strikes in the border regions of Kharkiv and Sumy. Ukraine and the Russian Federation accused each other

of planning attacks on the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant (cf. BN of 08.05.23 and 12.06.23). The inspections of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) did not discover any explosives or the like, but on 05.07.23 the IAEA demanded extended access to the plant.

### **Heavy shelling of Lviv; civilian war victims**

Up to ten people were killed in what the mayor said was the worst attack on the western Ukrainian city of Lviv since 24.02.22. Numerous other people were injured. In addition, more than 50 houses were destroyed by the missile strikes during the night of 06.07.23. The photos taken give an idea of the extent of the destruction. Since the beginning of the war of aggression, the city of Lviv and its surroundings have repeatedly been the target of attacks from the air. The local energy infrastructure was affected among other things (cf. BN of 17.10.22 and 16.01.23). On 13.03.22, more than 30 people were killed and many injured in air raids on a military training ground (cf. BN of 14.03.22).

Also, on 06.07.23, two people were reported fatally injured by Russian shelling in the southern Ukrainian oblast of Kherson. The Ukrainian military had counted a total of 84 artillery attacks, almost half of them on the regional capital of the same name.

On 08.07.23, the 500th day since the Russian invasion began on 24.02.22, at least seven civilians were killed and 13 injured in a Russian attack on the centre of Lyman (Donetsk oblast). According to Ukrainian sources, cluster munitions were used in the attack.

### **Supply of cluster munitions**

According to media reports, the US government announced on 07.07.23 that cluster munitions would be included in its new military aid package for Ukraine. The announcement was criticised nationally and internationally with reference to the Convention on Cluster Munitions, which also prohibits their use. More than 100 countries have joined the convention, including most NATO member states, but not the US, nor the warring parties, Ukraine and the Russian Federation. Both sides are said to have already used cluster munitions in the on-going conflict. Cluster munitions (such as rockets or bombs that burst and release numerous small explosive devices while still in the air) pose long-term dangers due to the high proportion of unexploded ordnance. The US defended the delivery by arguing, inter alia, that its system has a low unexploded ordnance rate of no more than 2.35%, while the rate is as high as 40% for the systems already used by the Russian side. Furthermore, Ukraine had provided written assurances for their use. Furthermore, Ukraine is short of other types of artillery. Both Ukraine and the US see the use of cluster munitions as useful in pushing back the Russian occupation. According to reports, the US government had hesitated for months before taking the current decision in favour of the supply.

## **17 July 2023**

### **Crimea: Drone attacks and explosion at bridge**

According to Russian reports, a major Ukrainian drone attack on Sevastopol, the port of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Crimea, was fully repelled on 16.07.23. Ukrainian drone attacks on the annexed peninsula are said to be recurrent. On the morning of 17.07.23, it was reported that traffic on the Crimean Bridge, which connects the Russian mainland to the annexed peninsula via the Kerch Strait, was suspended after an explosion at a pier. Two people died when their car was hit, reports said. Already on 08.10.22 a lorry had exploded on the Crimean bridge (cf. BN of 10.10.22). According to an agency report, Crimea continues to be the destination of numerous holidaymakers from the Russian Federation.

### **Other developments of the war effort**

A Russian air strike that hit a humanitarian distribution centre set up in a school building in Orikhiv (Zaporizhzhia oblast) killed seven people on 10.07.23. According to Ukrainian sources, eleven people were injured. A guided missile was used in the attack.

According to media reports, Russian fire repeatedly targeted the Kharkiv region, the region and city of Kiev as well as Kherson recently. Residential areas were hit and several civilians died in the latter city. More than 20 people were injured by missile fire in the city of Zaporizhzhia and its surrounding area.

According to Ukrainian sources, direct clashes between the two sides are ongoing around Bakhmut, Avdiivka and Maryinka (all in Donetsk oblast). In the latter two towns, Ukraine is on the defensive, according to Deputy Defence

Minister Hanna Maliar. Ukraine claimed minor territorial gains in the Zaporizhzhia region towards Berdyansk. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy warned against excessive expectations of the ongoing counter-offensive. According to the US newspaper Washington Post, Commander-in-Chief Valerii Zaluzhnyi in the meantime confirmed that the army was attacking targets on Russian territory. In view of the conditional delivery of Western weapons systems, it is using its own weapons for this purpose. According to Russian sources, Ukraine recently shelled the town of Shebekino near the border.

### **Abbot of the Kiev cave monastery in custody; Christmas on 25 December**

According to a media report of 14.07.23, the abbot of the Kiev cave monastery, Pavlo, which still belongs to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Ukrains'ka pravoslavna cerkva; UPC), was taken into custody. The detention will initially last until 14.09.23, according to the report. Since the beginning of the Russian invasion the authorities have repeatedly taken action against the UPC (cf. BN of 12.12.22, 20.03.23 and 15.05.23).

On 14.07.23, the parliament passed a law introduced by President Zelenskyy, which aims to "break away from Russian heritage", it is reported. In the future, Orthodox Christmas, which has been celebrated mostly on 7 January in Ukraine, will be celebrated on 25 December. Since 2017, 25 December has also been a public holiday. Until now, the UPC has celebrated its holidays according to the Julian calendar, which is 13 days later than the Gregorian calendar used today.

## **31 July 2023**

### **Development of the war effort**

According to media reports, on 24.07.23, the mayor of Reni, a town on the Danube in the border triangle with Romania and the Republic of Moldova, informed that three grain silos had been destroyed in his town. The region of Khmelnytsky (Western Ukraine) was targeted by four modern and fast-firing Kinzhal missiles on 27.07.23 during the day. On 28./29.07.23, the Russian side shelled several towns in the Dnipropetrovsk region, including the regional capital Dnipro, where at least nine people were injured when a high-rise building was hit. The Kharkiv region was the target of Russian shelling in the night of 28.07.23, when five people were injured in a village, on 29.07.23 and in the night of 31.07.23 several places were shelled, including the city of Kharkiv itself. On 30.07.23, two civilians were reported dead after a Russian missile attack on the town of Sumy (oblast of the same name). An educational institution was hit. 20 people were injured.

Fighting continued to be reported in the Donetsk region, including south of Bakhmut, during the Ukrainians' recapture of the village of Staromaiorske and in Zaporizhzhia, here south of Orikhiv. According to Ukrainian reports, a child was killed and four others were injured in a Russian cluster bomb attack on Kostiantynivka in the Donetsk region; a total of seven people were injured.

On 24.07.23, experts of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) announced the discovery of mines in the buffer zone between the inner and outer barriers of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant. According to an advisor to President Zelenskyy, Ukraine still needs more equipment in view of the current Russian tactics of overloading air defence systems by massive drone attacks and simultaneously attacking cities with ballistic missiles. While Kiev is relatively well protected against such attacks, Odesa, for example, is less so, he said. Following previous reports all drones were shot down during an attack on Kiev in the night of 25.07.23.

Zelenskyy expects renewed attacks by the Russian Federation on energy infrastructure in the upcoming autumn and winter of 2023; thus, the country must prepare for this, he said. He described it as an inevitable process that the war would increasingly reach Russian territory, including symbolic centres and military bases. Earlier, he had declared that the "deoccupation" of the Crimean Peninsula was under preparation. The Russian side, meanwhile, repeatedly reported intercepted Ukrainian drone attacks in Crimea and that an ammunition depot had been hit.

## **07 August 2023**

### **Development of the war effort**

A large residential building and a university building were hit in a suspected ballistic missile attack on the city of Kryvyi Rih on 31.07.23. At least six people, including a child, were killed and 75 others injured, the governor of the Dnipropetrovsk region informed. The city of Kharkiv and its surroundings were repeatedly targeted by Russian

shelling; there were reports of several wounded persons and one death. Kiev was the target of several drone attacks; debris from intercepted drones caused damage to buildings. Infrastructure used for exporting grain in Odesa and its surroundings also continued to be repeatedly attacked, just as the Danube port of Izmail on the border with Romania. On 06.08.23, several settlements in the Sumy region came under heavy fire from the Russian side, which also claimed to have attacked several military targets in western Ukraine.

On 06.08.23, the Ukrainian side, for its part, attacked two bridges that are critical for the supply routes connecting the Crimean Peninsula with the Russian-occupied parts of the Kherson region. Previously, new explosions had been reported on the Crimean bridge (to the Russian mainland) as well as attacks on a Russian tanker and a landing ship. Fatalities were reported in connection with attacks on Donetsk and the occupied part of the region; these included a Ukrainian attack with cluster munitions which reportedly hit the university in Donetsk.

Ongoing direct fighting was reported around the towns of Bakhmut and Lyman (Donetsk oblast) and Kupyansk (Kharkiv oblast). On 05.08.23, Russian troops were reported to have managed to break through a Ukrainian defence line in the Luhansk region.

The slow progress of the current Ukrainian counter-offensive is repeatedly explained by the prevalence of minefields (cf. BN of 03.07.23). According to a media report of 31.07.23, military analysts consider Ukraine's mine-clearing technology inadequate. The analysts said that the Russian armed forces are laying the minefields in an "innovative way" for their numerous defence lines.

**Peace conference in Saudi Arabia**

According to media reports, a conference on the war in Ukraine held in Jeddah on 05.08. and 06.08.23 concluded with a peace plan which includes a commitment to the territorial integrity of Ukraine. Delegations from around 40 states took part, including representatives of China. China's participation was hailed as a major success. The Russian Federation was not invited and had criticised the conference as "pointless".

## **14 August 2023**

### **Prison sentence for UPC metropolitans**

Metropolitan Ionafan of the Diocese of Tulchyn and Bratslav of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Ukrains'ka pravoslavna cerkva; UPC) was sentenced to five years imprisonment by a court in the city of Vinnytsia on 07.08.23. According to an agency report, he was accused of justifying the Russian aggression. Specifically, Ionafan was found guilty of incitement to violate territorial integrity, acts against the constitutional order and deliberate violation of the equal rights of citizens. The diocese said it had appealed. In May 2023, the first conviction of a UPC metropolitan, at the time the head of the diocese in the Kirovohrad region (cf. BN of 15.05.23), had been reported.

### **Pressure to accept Russian citizenship**

According to a media report citing statements of the Russian-appointed mayor of Lasurne, a town in the occupied Kherson region, on social media, he threatened anyone who would not adopt Russian citizenship. He said that they would not receive medication, nor would insulin be distributed. The distribution of humanitarian aid would also become dependent on citizenship.

### **Opening of border crossing with the Russian Federation**

On 05.08.23, Ukraine said it had opened a border crossing between the Sumy region and the Russian region of Belgorod for returning Ukrainian refugees, the media reported on 09.08.23. In addition, a contact point had been set up to enable displaced persons to continue their journey to Kiev or Kharkiv. Previously, those wishing to return had to take detours via EU states or Georgia.

### **Development of the war effort**

Two Russian missile attacks, at an interval of 40 minutes, on the town of Pokrovsk (Donetsk oblast) killed nine people and injured around 90 on 07.08.23, according to recent figures from Ukrainian authorities. Reportedly the victims include aid workers who were on the scene after the initial attack. On 09.08.23, the Russian-appointed mayor of Donetsk reported three dead and ten injured as a result of Ukrainian bombing that hit, among other places, a hospital. On 11.08.23, a Russian missile hit a hotel in Zaporizhzhia that is also used by UN staff; one person was killed. A Russian attack on Zaporizhzhia with three civilians dead had already been reported on 10.08.23. On the same day, according to Ukrainian reports, at least six people were injured when Russian shells hit a distribution

point for humanitarian aid in the Kherson region. Already on 05.08.23, a blood transfusion centre had been bombed in Kupyansk (Kharkiv oblast), according to President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Deaths and injuries were reported. A child was killed when Russian supersonic missiles hit the Ivano-Frankivsk region of western Ukraine, a report on 11.08.23 said.

Continued fierce fighting is reported from the front lines in the east and the south of the country. Russian forces have advanced near Kupyansk and Svatov (Kharkiv and Luhansk oblasts, respectively), while the Ukrainian side has reported partial successes near Staromajorske and Bakhmut (Donetsk oblast). Ukrainian authorities ordered the evacuation of 37 villages around Kupyansk. According to media reports, the evacuation is making slow progress. As of 12.08.23, 12,000 people still remained in Kupyansk city.

## **21 August 2023**

### **Civilian war victims (selection)**

According to Ukrainian sources, six people died from artillery fire in two villages in the Ukrainian-controlled part of the Kherson region on 13.08.23. In the night of 14.08.23, Russian attacks on Zaporizhzhia reportedly killed at least two people and injured three in Odesa. Repeated heavy Russian shelling continued on several localities in the Sumy region. In the night of 15.08.23, the western Ukrainian cities of Lutsk (Volyn oblast) and Lviv became targets of Russian cruise missile attacks. In Lutsk three people died, in Lviv 40 residential buildings were damaged and 15 people were injured. According to Ukrainian sources, converted anti-aircraft missiles were also used to fire at towns near the front, killing at least one person in Kramatorsk (Donetsk oblast). Seven people were killed in a missile attack on Chernihiv (Chernihiv oblast) on 19.08.23. The missile hit the city centre and also destroyed a theatre where an exhibition of drone manufacturers was shown. About 150 others were injured.

### **Development of the war effort**

Since the expiry of the agreement concluded in July 2022 under UN and Turkish mediation to allow Ukrainian grain exports (the so-called Black Sea Grain Initiative) on 17.07.23 due to the Russian Federation's unwillingness to extend it, the city and region of Odesa, including its grain export infrastructure, have been repeatedly targeted by Russian air strikes of various kinds. The Danube seaports of Izmail and Reni, that are now part of the main grain export route and are in close proximity to NATO territory, are also targeted by Russian attacks.

According to media reports, direct fighting continues on the front lines around Kupyansk and Lyman (Kharkiv and Luhansk oblasts), most intensively around Bakhmut and in the southern Donetsk region as well as in the Kherson region. The Ukrainian army announced that it had moved reserves to Kupyansk to prevent further Russian advances in the area. Kupyansk is being evacuated. Russian artillery fire injured eleven people there, according to reports on 21.08.23.

According to reports on 17.08.23 Ukraine managed to recapture the village of Uroshayne in the Zaporizhzhia region, however, according to a media report citing US intelligence, US generals expect that one of the main targets of the current counter-offensive, Melitopol, will not be reached. Melitopol is considered an important transport hub between the Crimean peninsula and other Russian-occupied areas in the country's south. It is said that some other, minor advances were made in the western part of the region in the meantime. On 20.08.23, the Russian army claimed to have eliminated 150 Ukrainian soldiers who had tried to cross the Dnipro into Russian-occupied territory.

According to estimates by US government officials, which became known through a newspaper article, 120,000 Russian combatants may have been killed and over 170,000 injured since 24.02.22. The Ukrainian side, whose forces have a significantly lower potential, losses are estimated at 70,000 with an additional 100,000-120,000 injured. However, the article also pointed out that such estimates are very unreliable.

### **New recruitment campaign; corruption suspected in recruitment offices**

According to media reports on 18.08.23, the government launched a new recruitment campaign under the slogan "Overcome the fear". The state of war was extended by another 90 days until 15.11.23, which means that men of military age are still not allowed to leave the country. On 11.08.23 it was reported that President Volodymyr Zelenskyy had dismissed the heads of all regional recruitment offices on suspicion of corruption. He declared that during a war bribery was tantamount to treason. Officers who are no longer fit to fight for health reasons are to take over these positions. Zelenskyy is said to have signed a decree to this effect on 17.08.23.

## 28 August 2023

### Civilian war victims (selection)

Citing Ukrainian authorities, a total of three civilians were reportedly killed and others injured in Russian artillery attacks on two locations near the small town of Lyman (Donetsk oblast) on 22.08.23. Four people were injured by shelling of the border village of Seredyno-Buda (Sumy oblast) on 23.08.23. In the town of Romny, also in the Sumy region but inland, two people died and at least three were injured in an attack on a school. According to information from the region's governor on 24.08.23, seven people were injured by rocket fire in the major city of Dnipro. A Russian attack that hit a café in the village of Podoly in the contested area of Kupyansk (Kharkiv oblast) killed two people and injured another person, as reported on 26.08.23. Furthermore, on the night of 28.08.23, a missile attack on an industrial plant in the Poltava region, which had been less frequently affected by the war, reportedly killed two people and injured two others; two more people are still missing.

### Development of the war effort

The Russian Federation continues to attack Ukrainian grain storage and distribution infrastructure in the Odesa region. For example, on the night of 23.08.23, the sea-Danube port of Izmail was damaged which resulted in reduced export capacities and the destruction of significant quantities of grain.

Similar to the weeks before, direct fighting was reported along the Kupyansk-Svatov-Kreminna line (Kharkiv and Luhansk oblasts), around Bakhmut, along the Avdiivka-Donetsk line and in central areas of the Zaporizhzhia region. The Institute for the Study of War (ISW) analysed that both sides managed to make certain advances in various sections of the front. In particular, the Ukrainian side succeeded in advancing behind the village of Robotyne (Zaporizhzhia oblast). This was later also announced by a representative of the Ukrainian army on 27.08.23.

In general, according to the Ukrainian military, the Russian forces can currently be observed to regroup which suggests the preparation of a new Russian offensive.

The Crimean Peninsula annexed by the Russian Federation also continues to be affected by the war. According to information from the Russian Defence Ministry, picked up by media on 25.08.23, its forces had destroyed 42 drones over Crimea. Two days earlier, the destruction of an anti-aircraft system in Crimea by Ukrainian military intelligence had been reported. There had already been repeated reports of (repelled) attacks by Ukrainian drones in Crimea. On 24.08.23, on the occasion of the Ukrainian national holiday (declaration of independence in 1991), special forces allegedly crossed over to the peninsula by boat. According to Ukrainian sources, the Russian army suffered losses and the Ukrainian flag was raised; according to Russian media, however, the Ukrainian attackers were killed.

## 04 September 2023

### Development of the war effort

According to reports on 29.08.23, one man was killed and another injured when Kupyansk (Kharkiv oblast) was shelled. On 30.08.23, Russian attacks on various regions in the south, east and north-east claimed at least five civilian lives, including two in the Kiev region; 15 people were injured, according to Ukrainian authorities. Four people were injured by artillery fire on the city of Nikopol and its surroundings (Dnipropetrovsk oblast), the Ukrainian authorities said on 03.09.23.

Direct fighting between Ukrainian and Russian forces continues in the Zaporizhzhia region, where on 29.08.23 the evacuation of children and escorts from five smaller villages was ordered. According to the Ukrainian army, it succeeded in breaking through the first Russian defence line at one point.

The war also continues at sea. On 30.08.23, for example, reports said with reference to Russian information that a navy aircraft had destroyed four Ukrainian military speedboats in the Black Sea. On 03.09.23, the Ukrainian side stated that it had destroyed a Russian patrol boat on the Black Sea coast. With reference to the British Ministry of Defence, it had already been reported that Ukraine and the Russian Federation were fighting for strategically important natural gas platforms in the Black Sea using naval and air forces. Furthermore, renewed attacks on the Danube seaports in Reni and Izmail (Odessa oblast) were reported on 03.09. and 04.09.23.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy tentatively mentioned demilitarisation with reference to the Crimean Peninsula, which was annexed by the Russian Federation in 2014 and has recently also been the scene of hostilities (cf. BN of 28.08.23). In the past, reconquering Crimea had been repeatedly postulated as the goal.

### **Zelenskyy on elections during the war**

After an interview in June 2023, in which President Zelenskyy referred to the legally enshrined ban on holding elections during a state of war, he addressed the issue again on 27.08.23, as is reported by the media. He made holding elections before the end of the war conditional on support and funding from the US and Europe. No part of the defence budget would be diverted for elections. A very quick change in the law will be necessary as well, he said. Normally, parliamentary elections would be due in October 2023 and presidential elections in March 2024.

### **Situation of school children**

On 01.09.23, the first day of the new school year, bomb threats were reported in Kiev schools. In general, children's education in Ukraine is facing major challenges due to the war, including more than 1,300 destroyed school buildings and permanent threats of attacks. Only about one third of the children are able to attend regular classes, according to UNICEF.

On the occasion of the traditional start of the school year, also in the Russian Federation, AI criticised a new history textbook for older students, which is also to be used in the occupied territories. It violates children's right to an adequate and quality education by misrepresenting and justifying the facts about Russia's aggression since 2014. The indoctrination of young people is a cynical attempt to erase Ukrainian culture, heritage and identity, UNICEF said.

## **11 September 2023**

### **Civilian war victims (selection)**

Russian shelling of the town centre of Kostyantynivka (Donetsk oblast), located about 25 km south-west of the embattled town of Bakhmut, killed at least 16 people and injured 33, according to information from Ukrainian sources of 06.09.23. An employee of an agricultural company was killed in ongoing drone attacks on the Odesa region, which particularly targeted the Danube seaport of Izmail, the region's governor said on the same day. Russian attacks targeted Izmail on several days. On 08.09.23, a Russian air strike on Odradokamyanka (Kherson oblast), located on the west bank of the Dnipro river, killed four people and injured three, according to Ukrainian sources. On the morning of 10.09.23, one person was injured in a drone strike on Kiev. The head of the local military administration urged the population to stay in shelters.

### **Further developments of the war effort**

Direct fighting continues to be reported from the southern and eastern fronts. Advances have been made by Ukraine around the town of Bakhmut (Donetsk oblast). On 10.09.23 it was reported that two foreign humanitarian workers died and two others were injured when a projectile hit their vehicle nearby. The Ukrainian side also made further gains in the Zaporizhzhia region. The Ukrainian general staff also reported these advances later. In the east, however, the Ukrainian army was concentrating on repelling Russian advances, according to the commander of the ground forces. An advance of Russian forces was noted by observers on the front line Kupyansk-Svatovsk-Kreminna (Kharkiv and Luhansk oblasts).

With reference to the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) own information, it was reported that IAEA experts stationed at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant had heard explosions in the vicinity on several days since 02.09.23. There had been no damage to the nuclear power plant.

### **Minister of Defence replaced**

After President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced on 03.09.23 that former Defence Minister Oleksii Reznikov would be dismissed, the parliament confirmed Rustem Umerov as his successor on 06.09.23. Umerov was previously head of the State Property Fund. According to media reports, Umerov's main task is to fight corruption within the army.

### **Oligarch Kolomoyskyi in pre-trial detention**

Ihor Kolomoyskyi, a former supporter of President Zelenskyy, was remanded in custody on 02.09.23 and charged on suspicion of fraud on 07.09.23. According to media reports, he is accused of embezzling funds amounting to over EUR 233 million. Kolomoyskyi, owner of banks, energy companies, metal companies, airlines and one of the country's most influential TV stations, had been blacklisted along with his family members for corruption by the

US State Department on 05.03.21 during his time as governor of the Dnipropetrovsk region. His arrest is interpreted as a signal sent internally and to Ukraine's international partners about the fight against corruption.

### **Elections in the occupied territories**

From 08.09. to 10.09.23, the Russian Federation held regional and local elections in the occupied parts of the regions of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson, which had been declared annexed on 30.09.22. Such elections were held on its own territory at the same time. According to the electoral commission, United Russia won more than 70 % of the votes in all four annexed regions. The election was considered a violation of international law by the Council of Europe.

## **18 September 2023**

### **Civilian victims**

According to the Governor of Odesa Region on 13.09.23, at least six people have been injured by drones in Izmail during the ongoing attacks on port infrastructure. The Minister of Infrastructure said that 105 port infrastructure facilities have been damaged or partially destroyed since the end of the grain export agreement, which expired at the instigation of the Russian Federation. Also according to Ukrainian information on 14.09.23, one child was killed and another injured by Russian artillery fire in the village of Novodmytrivka (Kherson oblast). On 15.09.23, it was reported that the local regional defence council had decided to evacuate families with children from parts of the oblast. According to local officials, Russian shelling of the southern Kherson oblast killed two people and injured three others on the night of 18.09.23.

### **Other developments of the war effort**

On 12.09.23, the head of the Russian nuclear authorities Rosatom reported a Ukrainian drone attack over the city of Enerhodar, near the nuclear power plant Zaporizhzhia. He said that some drones had been intercepted and others caused no damage. With regard to the disputed gas and oil rigs in the Black Sea (cf. BN of 04.09.23), Ukraine claimed the recapture of the so-called Boyko rigs, which have been under Russian control since 2015. With reference to both sides, media also reported on 13.09.23 that two Russian warships, which were in the Crimean port of Sevastopol for repairs, were damaged by a Ukrainian attack. According to the media, a modern Russian air defence system was hit by Ukrainian drones in the night of 14.09.23.

From the fronts, the Ukrainian side reported terrain gains near Bakhmut (Donetsk oblast) and near Robotyne (Zaporizhzhia oblast). On the evening of 17.09.23, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy specifically announced the recapture of the village of Klishchivka south of Bakhmut. In the morning of 18.09.23, however, fierce fighting was reported in and around the village. According to Ukrainian sources, the Russian forces have already stepped up their attacks on Marjinka and Avdiivka (Donetsk oblast).

## **25 September 2023**

### **Civilian victims of war**

The missile strike in the city centre of Kostyantynivka (Donetsk oblast), which according to recent reports claimed the lives of at least 17 people and injured more than 30 others on 06.09.23 (cf. BN of 11.09.23), may have been caused by a misguided Ukrainian missile, according to media reports.

In Russian attacks on the night of 19.09.23, one person died in Lviv when civilian warehouses some of which were storing humanitarian supplies, were hit and collapsed. In Kherson, an attack hit a trolley bus, killing a policeman and injuring one or two people. Reports on 24.09.23 said that attacks on residential areas in Beryslav District left two or three people dead and several injured in the Ukrainian-controlled part of Kherson Oblast. In Kupiansk (Kharkiv Oblast), Russian shelling killed at least three people on 19.09.23, and five according to later information, while rescue workers searched for more victims. In each case, the information is from local sources. In a wave of attacks targeting at least six towns in different parts of the country, a total of two civilians were reportedly killed and at least 21 injured on 21.09.23, ten of them in Cherkassy alone. A Russian attack on the front-line town of Kurakhove (Donetsk oblast) injured 13 civilians, according to local reports on 21.09.23. On 22.09.23, another (also see below) attack on Kremenchuk (Poltava oblast) was reported, killing one person and injuring more than 50, according to new information.



### **Development of the war effort**

On 20.09.23 it was reported that an oil refinery in Kremenchuk (Poltava oblast) had to stop production after a Russian attack. Energy infrastructure was also the target of what was reported to be the largest wave of Russian attacks since 15.08.23 on 21.09.23, as a result of which power was reportedly lost in parts of Kiev, Zhytomyr, Dnipropetrovsk, Rivne and Kharkiv regions. Meanwhile, the safety situation at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant has improved somewhat, according to the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), an agency report said.

The Russian army has stepped up its fight for the islands in the Dnipro River (Kherson oblast), reports say citing British military experts. The part of Kherson oblast on the left of the lower course of the Dnipro is under Russian control, the part on the right of the Dnipro is again under Ukraine's control after the counter-offensive in autumn 2022. There have been repeated reports of attacks or attempted attacks by the Ukrainian side on military facilities on the occupied Crimean Peninsula, including a successful one on the headquarters of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol. According to Ukrainian sources, nine people were killed and 16 injured, including two generals; the Russian side had reported one soldier missing. Reports from the fronts remain unchanged: in some places the Ukrainian side (Zaporizhzhia region, around Robotyne; Donetsk region, around Bakhmut), in some places the Russian side (around Kupyansk and Lyman, Kharkiv and Luhansk oblasts) is making advances, but without making any major territorial gains. On 24.09.23, however, Ukraine claimed a breach of the Russian defence lines at the village of Verbove near Robotyne.

### **Exchange of Deputy Ministers of Defence**

According to media reports, on 18.09.23 the government dismissed the six deputy defence ministers, including Hanna Maliar, the deputy defence minister, who often publicly presented the events on the front-line (cf. BN of 03.07.23 and 17.03.23). The new defence minister, Rustem Umierov, only took office on 06.09.23 (cf. BN of 11.09.23). The first deputy defence minister, Oleksandr Pavlyuk, who has been in office since 14.02.23, is apparently not affected by the current change in the ministry's leadership.

## **09 October 2023**

### **Civilian war victims**

Recurrent Russian shelling of riverside areas on the right bank of the Dnieper in the Kherson region has led to various reports of injured and killed civilians. Three people died in an attack on the regional capital of the same name in the night of 28.09.23. According to information from the governor of the Zaporizhzhia region, five people were injured in two Russian rocket attacks on the village of Matviivka on 30.09.23.

On 05.10.23 a Russian rocket attack hit a wake in the village of Hrosa (Kharkiv oblast, around 30 km west of Kupyansk). According to Ukrainian reports, 52 people died in the attack. Ukrainian reports also claim that a Russian rocket attack on a residential building in the city of Kharkiv on 06.10.23 killed two people and injured more than 20.

The regional governor appointed by the Russian occupying forces has reported that a car exploded in Nova Kakhovka (occupied part of Kherson oblast) on 07.10.23, killing an official of the local branch of Russia's ruling United Russia party. According to a report in the media, no-one has claimed responsibility for the explosion as yet. After a rocket attack took place on 08.10.23 on Kostiantynivka (Donetsk oblast), which is situated close to the front, injuring four people and damaging 29 residential buildings, the incumbent governor called on the remaining population to evacuate the city.

According to the Ukrainian air force's press spokesman, Russia is expected to launch a large number of attacks on the energy infrastructure using Iranian drones in the coming winter, on a scale far greater than was witnessed last winter.

### **Further course of the war**

The Russian Federation has repeatedly carried out massive attacks on the infrastructure for storing and exporting grain. The relevant facilities in the Odessa region were a particular focus of such attacks, though by no means the sole targets. Again and again, the attacks led to civilian casualties.

According to information from Ukraine and the British ministry of defence, some mercenaries of the Russian Wagner Group have returned from Belarus to the Donetsk region and are presumably being deployed again around

the embattled city of Bakhmut. The Wagner Group withdrew from Ukraine prior to the failed revolt (cf. BN of 26.06.23) and was subsequently admitted into Belarus (cf. BN of 05.06.23, 26.06.23 and 03.07.23). There are reports of indications that the Russian government has taken over control of the Wagner Group.

Fighting is said to be continuing around the village of Klishchiivka, south of Bakhmut, which was reported to have been recaptured on 17.09.23 (cf. BN of 18.09.23). Klishchiivka is important for the control of a railway line leading to Bakhmut.

### **Territories occupied and annexed by Russia**

According to reports in the media, the Russian Federation observed the anniversary of the annexation of the (occupied parts of) the Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions as “Reunification Day” on 29./30.09.23. The deputy head of the Russian security council, Dmitry Medvedev, noted in this connection that there would be further new regions in Russia, without mentioning Ukraine explicitly. According to a report in the media, the autumn conscription campaign, which is set to begin on 01.10.23, will for the first time also include the young men in the occupied territories. Another report in the media states that these conscripts are not to be deployed in Ukraine, without specifying whether this rules out deployment in the annexed territories themselves.

## **16 October 2023**

### **Civilian war victims**

All of the 59 people killed in a Russian rocket attack which hit a funeral congregation in the Kharkiv region on 05.10.23 (cf. BN of 09.10.23) have now been identified. It is reported that two brothers who previously lived in the region are suspected of having provided information for the attack.

A Russian attack on a school in Nikopol (Dnipropetrovsk oblast) on 11.10.23 reportedly killed four people and injured two. According to another report in the media, 23 people were injured and one person was killed when a social security building was hit by artillery fire in Pokrovsk (Donetsk oblast) on 13.10.23. According to local information, sustained shelling of the Ukraine-controlled part of the Kherson region on 14.10. and 15.10.23 killed two people and injured three. Two people died and one person was injured in a bomb attack on a village in the Kharkiv region on 15.10.23.

It was reported in the media on 15.10.23 that three exploding mines on the same day in different regions of the country killed two people, including two juveniles, and injured three, one of whom was also a juvenile. The explosions took place in the Mykolaiv region, Chernihiv and Kharkiv.

### **Further course of the war**

According to its own accounts, Ukraine thwarted an attempt by an eight-strong Russian sabotage group to cross the border on the night of 11.10.23. The group was evidently intending to sabotage a critical object of civilian infrastructure in the Sumy region. The region continues to come under fire due to its location close to the border. According to the governor of the Sumy region, 93 explosions were recorded there on 15.10.23. There are no reports of any casualties.

After amassing troops and materials in the area, since 10.10.23, the Russian armed forces have been attempting to encircle and capture the town of Avdiivka, which has been largely abandoned (less than 2,000 of a total population in the order of 32,000 are said to have remained in the town) and which lies only a few kilometres to the north of Donetsk. This is reportedly one of the largest Russian offensives of recent months, and intense fighting is in progress. On the fourth day of the Russian attacks, representatives of the Ukrainian side stated that they were managing to hold the line.

A Ukrainian general was reported in the media on 14.10.23 as saying that fighting in the north-east had become markedly worse, with daily Russian attacks. He may have been referring to the fronts close to the city of Kupyansk (Kharkiv oblast) and to the east and north of Lyman (Donetsk oblast), from where fighting is reported. Direct fighting is also reported in the region around Bakhmut (Donetsk oblast), on the southern front in the centre of the Zaporizhzhia region and near Velyka Novosilka (Donetsk oblast, near to the border with Zaporizhzhia oblast).

## 23 October 2023

### **Civilian war victims; humanitarian and human rights situation**

At least ten people were killed in total as a result of Russian attacks on 17.10. and 18.10.23 which hit residential buildings in Zaporizhzhia and the power supply infrastructure in the Kharkiv region, for example. Shelling of the part of the Kherson region which is held by Ukraine continues. According to local information, one woman was killed and one injured in Beryslav on 20.10.23. Six employees died in an attack on a mail distribution centre in the Kharkiv region on 21.10.23. 17 people were injured, seven of whom are said to still be in a critical condition.

The general staff state that more than one third of the country's land area is contaminated with mines and explosive objects as a result of the war.

According to information from the Ukrainian authorities which has been taken up by the media, cultural assets were stolen, damaged or destroyed on a large scale to the value of several hundred million euros in the course of the invasion by the Russian Federation (RF). More than 600 buildings of cultural significance fell victim to the ransacking. After the city of Kherson was liberated, it emerged that some 16,000 objects were missing from the museum of art. 14 archaeological artefacts which a Russian stole from the occupied territories have reportedly now been recovered.

In connection with the transfer of children from Ukraine to the RF (cf. BN of 16.01., 20.03. and 03.04.23) and to Belarus, which is referred to as unlawful, in recent weeks there have been reports in the media concerning a number of small groups of repatriated children. The parliamentary commissioner for human rights announced on 21.10.23 that three children had recently been repatriated. There are various estimates as to the number of minors illegally taken from Ukraine. A report by the independent UN Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine which was presented on 20.10.23 concludes that the transfer of 31 children to the RF in May 2022 constitutes illegal deportation and thus a war crime.

The commission has reportedly also established cases of severe torture in the occupied territories, particularly on men suspected of collaborating with the Ukrainian army, and cases of rape in conjunction with other forms of violence. The investigations are also reported to have revealed three cases of human rights violations by the Ukrainian authorities against individuals suspected of collaborating with the RF.

### **Course of the war**

The RF is reported to be attacking Ukrainian defensive positions along the front line from Kupyansk to Lyman (Kharkiv, Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts). The commander of the Ukrainian ground forces said on 16.10.23 that the situation there had escalated. According to president Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the situation remains particularly difficult in Avdiivka, a city located directly to the north of Donetsk against which the Russian forces have launched a new offensive (cf. BN of 16.10.23), as well as in Marinka, to the west of Donetsk. The Ukrainian army is said to be holding its positions.

### **Abbot of Monastery of the Caves charged; possible ban on UPC**

After being remanded in custody on 14.07.23 (cf. BN of 17.07.23), the abbot of the Kiev Monastery of the Caves, which belongs to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Ukrainian: Ukraïns'ka pravoslavna cerkva; UPC) has now been charged, according to reports in the media. He reportedly stands accused of violating the equality of citizens and of justifying and/or denying the existence of armed aggression against Ukraine.

It is further reported in the media that a bill to ban the UPC received broad approval in parliament in its first reading on 19.10.23. UPC's suspected collaboration with the RF is stated as providing the grounds for the potential ban. The UPC, which declared its independence from the Moscow Patriarchate in May 2022 (cf. BN of 12.12.22), denies the accusations and describes the bill as unconstitutional.

## 30 October 2023

### **Course of the war**

The city of Avdiivka remains the target of heavy shelling by the Russian army and is under sustained attack from several sides, although the Russian troops have reportedly lost up to 8,000 soldiers in their advances on the ground to date. The Ukrainian side appraises the military situation in Avdiivka as extremely difficult.

The US government claims that the Russian army is executing soldiers who refuse to follow orders or who withdraw from their positions when they come under Ukrainian fire.

The Russian army launched a new offensive in the direction of the cities of Avdiivka and Kupyansk on 10.10.23 (cf. BN of 16.10.23).

#### **Civilian war victims and humanitarian situation**

According to information from the regional governor of Kharkiv, two civilians were killed in a Russian artillery attack on a village near Kupyansk on 25.10.23. According to information from the Ukrainian side, two people also died and a number of people were injured in shelling of the city of Kherson on the same day.

On 26.10.23 the area around the Ukrainian nuclear power plant in Khmelnytskyi was attacked using eleven Shahed drones of Iranian origin. 16 people were injured, a number of radiation monitoring stations were temporarily cut off from the energy supply and power lines were destroyed.

A fire brigade station in the city of Isyum was hit by Russian shelling on 27.10.23. Eight people were injured. A number of people were reportedly injured and at least ten buildings damaged in heavy Russian shelling of Kherson city centre on 28.10.23.

### **06 November 2023**

#### **Course of the war**

The commander-in-chief of the Ukrainian armed forces, general Valerii Zaluzhnyi, has stated that the ground war in Ukraine has become deadlocked, with no breakthrough to be expected in the Ukrainian offensive in the south. He said that only a significant technological advantage could offer the Ukraine a way out of trench warfare, adding that the Ukrainian forces lacked modern aircraft to support the ground offensive from the air.

Ukrainian navy forces have so far been able to defend the bridgehead established on the southern bank of the Dnieper in the middle of October against Russian counter-attacks. Whether the bridgehead can be maintained and possibly expanded will depend on whether the Ukrainian forces are able to transport heavy weapons and armoured vehicles over the Dnieper, however.

#### **Civilian casualties**

On 31.10.23 two Russian soldiers were arrested by the Russian investigating authorities on suspicion of having killed a family of nine in the city of Volnovakha in the Russian-controlled part of Ukraine.

At a session of the UN Security Council on 01.11.23, Ramesh Rajasingham, director of coordination at the UN office for humanitarian aid, announced that the UN was able to verify the death of at least 9,900 Ukrainian civilians in Russian attacks on houses, schools and markets. He added that the actual number of casualties was certainly higher. According to the director, more than 18 million people – 40 % of the Ukrainian population – are dependent on humanitarian aid.

The Ukrainian authorities have reported that the Russian military shelled more than 100 Ukrainian settlements in the space of 24 hours on 01.11.23. On no other day in 2023 has such a large number of settlements been shelled. The authorities further state that more than 260 Ukrainian civilians have been killed and more than 570 injured by anti-personnel mines since the beginning of the war in February 2022.

On 03.11.23 the Russian military carried out a large-scale attack with 40 drones, targeting critical infrastructure in the west and south of Ukraine. The Ukrainian air force claims to have shot down 24 of these drones.

### **13 November 2023**

#### **Course of the war**

In its daily bulletin of 07.11.23, the Ukrainian general staff announced that the Ukrainian army had repelled 15 attacks by the Russian army near to Kupyansk, 18 attacks near to Marinka and 9 attacks in and around Avdiivka in the preceding 24 hours.

#### **Civilian casualties and humanitarian situation**

A Russian missile exploded outside the National Art Museum in Odesa on the night of 04.11.23. The explosion caused serious damage to Potocki Palace, which dates from the 19th century, and a number of exhibited paintings

were destroyed. The art museum is well-known for its unique collection of works of art from the 19th to the early 20th century.

According to information from Ukrainian authorities in Donetsk oblast, two people were killed in Toretsk and one person was killed in Minkivka in Russian attacks on civilian targets on the night of 11.11.23. On the same day, a 64-year-old man was killed and his wife seriously injured in Russian shelling of the city of Kherson, according to information from the regional governor, Oleksandr Prokudin.

#### **No presidential election to be held in 2024**

In his evening video address on 06.11.23, president Volodymyr Zelenskyy emphasized that the presidential elections would not be held according to schedule in March 2024, as “the defence of the nation, the fight for freedom and the destruction of the occupiers” must take priority. The decision is in compliance with the Ukrainian constitution, which prohibits elections when martial law is in force. Martial law has been declared eight times for a period of 90 days in each instance since the beginning of the Russian war of aggression and is to be further extended.

#### **Ukrainian parliament approves budget plan for 2024**

The Ukrainian parliament passed the country’s national budget plan for 2024 on 09.11.23. More than half of the expenditure totalling approx. EUR 86.8 billion is to be allocated to the defence sector and to funding support for the war against the Russian army. According to information from the Ukrainian government, this will result in a large budget deficit of approx. EUR 40.7 billion.

### **20 November 2023**

#### **Course of the war**

Fighting continues, among other places, around Avdiivka and other settlements in the Donetsk region in the vicinity of the regional capital of the same name. The Russian side has reportedly achieved small territorial gains at several locations here. On the other side, the media report that Ukraine has been able to reinforce its new positions on the left bank of the Dnieper in the Russian-controlled part of the Kherson region (cf. BN of 06.11.23). Analysts believe that the aim of this Ukrainian operation could be either to prepare for an offensive or merely to draw Russian forces away from other sections of the front.

Reports in the media citing representatives of the Ukrainian cyber defence organisation state that Ukraine has been the target of almost 4,000 cyber attacks since 24.02.22, representing a roughly three-fold increase in frequency compared to the period prior to this date. During a visit by the new British foreign secretary, David Cameron, president Volodymyr Zelenskyy stated that there had been a marked reduction in deliveries of artillery ammunition by western allies since the war in Gaza began in October 2023.

#### **Civilian war victims and humanitarian situation**

One person died in drone and artillery attacks on the district of Nikopol (Dnipropetrovsk oblast) on 14.11.23. It was reported on 17./18.11.23 that two people had been killed in the Ukraine-controlled part of the Donetsk region. Citing information from the Ukrainian authorities, it was also reported on 18./19.11.23 that two rescuers and seven other people were injured when Russian missiles hit the village of Komyshevukha (Zaporizhzhia oblast). A very similar report was published on 16.11.23; it is unclear whether this refers to the same incident.

Away from direct fighting, the Ukrainian-controlled part of the Kherson region currently appears to be a particular focus of Russian attacks. On 14.11.23 a hospital and residential areas were hit in the oblast capital of the same name, killing three people and injuring at least twelve. Two people died and at least twelve were injured in shelling of various areas in the region on 16.11.23. It was reported on 17./18.11.23 that at least nine people had been killed in attacks on residential districts, shopping areas and administration buildings in the city of Kherson. Five people reportedly incurred injuries from shrapnel following Russian shelling in the Kherson region on the morning of 19.11.23.

According to the Ukrainian government, several thousand residents of settlements close to the front in the east and south of the country were left without electricity after the Russian side had attacked the local energy infrastructure. In this context, president Zelenskyy was reported as having said on 18.11.23 that Ukraine had been able to bolster its air defences before the winter, thanks to western support. It appears that systematic Russian attacks on the infrastructure which began in October 2022 caused large-scale outages of power, heating and water

supplies in the autumn and winter of 2022/2023 (cf. BN of 17.10., 24.10., 31.10., 21.11., 28.11., 19.12.22., 02.01., 30.01. and 06.02.23). Zelenskyy suspects that the delayed start to such attacks this year as compared to last year is due to the Russian Federation stocking up on weapons to be deployed for this purpose.

According to the Ukrainian government, some 3,000 trucks, including vehicles carrying fuel and humanitarian aid, are being forced to wait on the Polish side of the joint border because Polish truck drivers have set up a blockade of three crossing points in protest at Ukrainian competition.

## **27 November 2023**

### **Course of the war**

Citing the think tank Institute for the Study of War (ISW), media sources report that the Russian side is continuing to make minor territorial gains in pursuit of its objective of surrounding the city of Avdiivka (Donetsk oblast). Meanwhile, Ukraine has reportedly managed to recapture a number of positions in its operations to defend the city of Kupiansk (Kharkiv oblast) – a railway hub – against Russia's suspected intentions to recapture the city which it lost in the Ukrainian counter-offensive of 2022. Ukrainian positions near Krynky on the left bank of the Dnieper in the Kherson region (cf. BN of 06.11.23) are reported to have come under attack.

President Zelenskyy has said that Ukraine needs more air defence systems in order to protect territories close to the Russian border and the routes used to export grain. 20 countries are reported to have formed a coalition to strengthen Ukraine's air defences. According to the British Ministry of Defence's assessment, Ukraine is managing to inflict heavy losses on the Russian forces far behind the front lines by means of precision attacks. For its part, the Russian Federation has not deployed any of its best air-launched cruise missiles for almost two months, which has probably enabled it to build up a stockpile of these weapons. The spokesperson of the US security council has expressed concern that Iran could supply ballistic missiles for the Russian war of aggression, which would be likely to have dramatic consequences for the Ukrainian population.<sup>33</sup>

### **Two cyber defence directors dismissed**

By its own account, the government has dismissed the director of the State Service of Special Communications and Information Protection (SSSCIP) and his deputy on grounds of suspected embezzlement at this authority which is responsible for the country's cyber defence. Cyber attacks on Ukraine have reportedly increased since 24.02.22 (cf. BN of 20.11.23).<sup>34</sup>

### **Civilian war victims and humanitarian situation**

The UN reported on 21.11.23 that at least 10,000 civilians had been killed and more than 18,500 injured since 24.02.22. The actual death toll could be substantially higher, as the stated figures relate solely to confirmed cases. In the three-month period from August to October 2023, 86 % of civilian casualties occurred in Ukraine-controlled territories. In the same period, almost half of the casualties were the victims of attacks far away from the front.

According to information from the governor of Dnipropetrovsk oblast on 20.11.23, one person died and one was injured when Russian artillery fire damaged a gas pipeline and a power line in the city of Nikopol. Three people were reportedly killed in a Russian attack on a hospital in the city of Selydove (Donetsk oblast) on 21.11.23. It was reported on 24.11.23 that Russian shelling of Ukraine-controlled territories in the Donetsk region had killed two people. Attacks, including the use of cluster bombs, in the Kherson region on the right bank of the Dnieper are reported to have claimed six civilian lives. Prior to this, Russian artillery shelling which hit a car park in the oblast's capital of the same name, is said to have killed two people on 20.11.23. In a drone attack described by the Ukrainian side as the largest since the beginning of the Russian invasion, five people were injured by falling debris on the night of 24.11.23. 17,000 people in the Kiev region were reportedly without electricity. In all, Ukraine claims to have shot down 74 out of a total of 75 "kamikaze drones".

According to the relevant authorities, Ukraine is unable to generate sufficient heating energy to cover the increasing demand and has turned to neighbouring EU member states for support. An outbreak of winter weather on 26.11.23 reportedly left around 400 settlements spread over ten regions without electricity. Annexed Crimea is reportedly also affected, with almost half a million people without electricity there.

According to the British Ministry of Defence, at least 11,000 Ukrainian children from the age of four are being held at 43 re-education facilities in the Russian Federation and in Crimea.

## **04 December 2023**

### **Course of the war**

With the onset of winter, president Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said that the war is entering a new phase. It has been reported that following talks with commanders of sections of the front in the east and south he also stated in his evening address that the construction of defence systems at the front and around Kiev must be accelerated. This comment is being interpreted as indicating a further consolidation of the fronts into trench warfare situation (or, inappropriately, a state of frozen conflict). Zelenskyy expressed his regret at the number of troops killed in action on the Ukrainian side and stated his dissatisfaction at the fact that certain types of weapons were not being delivered.

Heavy fighting is reported in the press in particular around Avdiivka and also Bakhmut, both of which are located in Donetsk oblast. The Russian side claims to have captured the town of Chromowe on the western fringe of Bakhmut. The Russian forces are reportedly also attempting to recapture positions which they have lost around the village of Robotyne (Zaporizhzhia oblast). A video which allegedly shows two surrendering Ukrainian soldiers being shot dead at close quarters by Russian forces has caused a stir.

### **Reform of conscription system announced**

It has been reported in the media that Zelenskyy announced a reform to the provisions regulating conscription into the armed forces on 01.12.23. At present, these provisions prevent demobilisation in conjunction with martial law. Relatives of soldiers serving at the front have been staging local protests - most recently on 02.12.23 - at which they have repeatedly called for these provisions to be removed and for the burdens to be shared by others. The Ukrainian armed forces are currently said to comprise some 820,000 people (with no distinction as to those who are under arms or not). Meanwhile, the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, has ordered a further enlargement of the Russian army, to 1.32 million armed personnel.

### **Civilian casualties and humanitarian situation**

The sustained shelling of the Kherson region continues to claim civilian lives. One death was reported on 03.12.23; on 30.11.23 three people died in the village of Sadove. A woman died of gunshot wounds in Kostiantynivka, a city close to the front in Donetsk oblast, on 03.12.23. On 02.12.23 one person was killed in connection with Russian shelling which destroyed two residential buildings in neighbouring Chasiv Yar. On 30.11.23 Russian artillery fire targeting various localities in the Donetsk region killed at least three people in all, with further people reported to be under the rubble of destroyed buildings. On 28.11.23 Russian attacks which hit various localities, including Nikopol (Dnipropetrovsk oblast), killed a total of four people and injured at least five.

It is also reported on the basis of information from the Ukrainian side that no exchanges of prisoners between Ukraine and the Russian Federation have taken place for three months.

A comprehensive solution has still to be found in the dispute over what Polish truck drivers consider to be unfair competition from Ukrainian truck drivers, which has led to a blockade of the border (cf. BN of 20.11.23). Slovakian truck drivers have similarly begun a blockade at the border between Ukraine and Slovakia.

## **11 December 2023**

### **Course of the war**

Russian troops have reportedly made further small territorial gains in the area of the heavily embattled city of Avdiivka (Donetsk oblast). This may make the capture of the coke factory in the city more imminent. According to a report from a correspondent, the Ukrainian defence forces are practically paralysed by a severe lack of ammunition.

### **Humanitarian and political situation**

At least two people were killed and one injured in Russian shelling of the city of Kherson on 05.12.23. A drone attack on infrastructure for grain trade on the Danube (Odessa oblast) on 07.12.23 caused damage to the infrastructure and killed one person. This is reported by media citing Ukrainian information in each instance.

Following the failure to pass a law in the USA providing for further billions of dollars of aid for Ukraine, the president's wife, Olena Selenska, warned that the absence of western support signalled mortal danger for the

population. The British ministry of defence sees the beginning of a concerted campaign by the Russian army against the energy infrastructure, after 16 air-launched missiles were fired at Kiev and other parts of the country on 07.12.23 alone.

According to the latest figures released by the national human rights commissioner, the confirmed number of children abducted by the Russian Federation now stands at 19,540. It was reported on 06.12.23 that six children were on their way back to Ukraine, following mediation by Qatar. Qatar had previously brokered the return of four children in October.

In the wake of the announcement by the chairwoman of the Russian federation council (upper house), Valentina Matviyenko, that the population in the occupied Ukrainian territories will also be able to vote in the presidential election which is scheduled for mid-March 2024, the government called for international sanctions on individuals involved in organising and implementing the ballot and threatened to prosecute such individuals.

### **Attacks on pro-Russian politicians**

On 06.12.23 the former opposition and pro-Russian parliamentarian, Illia Kyva, was found dead on the grounds of a hotel in the vicinity of Moscow. A month before the invasion in February 2022 he fled to the Russian Federation, from where he frequently criticised the Ukrainian government on TV and on the internet. Ukrainian media are attributing his death to the Ukrainian secret service (SBU). Also on 06.12.23, Oleg Popov, an MP in the pro-Russian regional parliament of Luhansk, was killed when a car bomb exploded. No further details have emerged.

### **EU reforms: Laws signed**

Ahead of the European Council session on 14./15.12.23, at which a decision is to be reached on opening EU accession negotiations with Ukraine, it has been reported in the media that president Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed four laws on 08.12.23 via which the country aims to meet EU requirements. The legislation includes laws to combat corruption and a law on the rights of national minorities. Hungary's prime minister, Viktor Orbán, recently threatened to veto a resolution by the European Council in favour of Ukraine.

## **18 December 2023**

### **Course of the war**

According to reports in the press on 17.12.23, the think tank Institute for the Study of War (ISW) has identified minor territorial gains by the Russian forces in the areas of Bakhmut and Avdiivka (both in Donetsk oblast) and Verbove (Zaporizhzhia oblast). The Russian side claimed on 12.12.23 that it had made significant advances in the Zaporizhzhia region (in the area of the village of Novoprokopivka). It has also been reported in the media that the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) has claimed to have smashed a network of Ukrainian agents in Crimea whose mission was to murder pro-Russian personalities. The FSB has allegedly prevented 18 "terrorist attacks" in 2023.

### **Civilian casualties and other events concerning the humanitarian situation**

According to reports in the media, Kiev was targeted by ten Russian missiles on the night of 12.11.23. Although the missiles were shot down by the air defence system, falling debris injured at least 53 people. Damage was caused to residential buildings and a children's hospital, for example. The regions of Sumy, Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporizhzhia, which are situated close to the border and/or the front, were recently hit by fire from Russian mortars and other weapons. At least one person was injured in Sumy and two were injured in Zaporizhzhia on 16.12.23. One person died in Odesa oblast when they were hit by debris from an intercepted Russian drone on the night of 16.12.23.

A member of Keretsky local council (Zakarpattia oblast) detonated three hand grenades during a meeting on 15.12.23. The explosions seriously injured the man concerned, in addition to which 25 other people were injured and one person died. According to the media coverage, the motive of the politician, who belongs to president Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Servant of the People party, was not immediately apparent.

On 12.12.23 the mobile phone and internet service operator Kyivstar, which is said to serve more than half of the population, was the target of a massive cyber attack. Kyivstar's services were severely disrupted, but were fully restored by 16.12.23. Banks, cash terminals and air raid warning systems were also affected by the attack. The cyber attack is being attributed to Russian hackers and was one of the most destructive since 24.02.22.

According to other reports in the media, the blockade of a number of border crossing points between Poland and Ukraine by Polish truck drivers is continuing. A Ukrainian truck driver who became ill while waiting to cross the



border died on 16.12.23. This was the third such case since the beginning of the blockade. Meanwhile, the Slovakian truck drivers announced the end of their protest on 15.12.23 (cf. BN of 20.11. and 04.12.23).

#### **Ukraine / Republic of Moldova – European Council resolves to open accession negotiations**

Following the corresponding recommendation by the European Commission (cf. BN of 13.11.23), the heads of state and heads of government of the EU member states resolved at their summit on 14.12.23 to open accession negotiations with accession candidates Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. The Council of Ministers must now adopt the respective negotiating frameworks.

It had previously been feared that Hungary would veto the resolution concerning Ukraine (cf. BN of 11.12.23). According to coverage of the matter in the media, the required unanimity was achieved by persuading Hungary's prime minister, Viktor Orbán, to refrain from taking part in the vote. He nevertheless reiterated his view that Ukraine was not yet ready for accession agreements. One of Orbán's advisors noted that his country would have a further 70 opportunities to veto the proceedings before Ukraine actually joined the EU.

In the further course of the European Council session, Orbán blocked a financial package comprising loans and transfers to a total of 50 billion euros for the period from 2024-2027 which was planned in view of Ukraine's massive budget deficit resulting from the current war. Following the session, European Council President Charles Michel stated that the EU nevertheless had the necessary tools to provide dependable support for Ukraine.

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