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Ukraine – European Union

■ *THEME ANALYSIS: EU summit: Ukraine is on the top of the agenda*



Photo: Cabinet of Ministers Of Ukraine

Since the beginning of 2024, against the backdrop of the American political crisis, we can see the EU taking on the role of **Ukraine's main ally**. The EU is now giving Ukraine a central role in the development of its future policy. Against this backdrop, Kyiv is also making active efforts to further its European integration.

For example, the Ukrainian delegation took part in a constituent meeting at the end of January 2024 to launch screening, an important process of assessing Ukrainian legislation for compliance with EU law, which precedes the official start of accession negotiations. This was reported to Yevropeiska Pravda by the press service of Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration Olha Stefanishyna, who headed the Ukrainian delegation.

As part of the preparations for the immediate pre-accession talks, Ukraine will develop roadmaps in the areas of rule of law, freedom of movement of persons (justice, freedom, security) and public administration reform. During the meeting, the European side presented the features and stages of the official screening process. As part of this process, the EU has drawn up a schedule of meetings between representatives of Ukrainian ministries and the European Commission. Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration Olha Stefanishyna stressed that Ukrainian institutions are mobilised and ready to work together actively.

At the same time, the EU, which has embarked on the path of remilitarisation, is interested in Ukraine's experience in rebuilding the military-industrial complex. Thus, the EU has engaged Ukraine in the development of a future strategy for the EU's defence industry. In her speech to the European Parliament, President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen noted that the EU countries together had provided military aid to Ukraine worth more than €28 billion and trained more than 40,000 military personnel. She stressed that while this is an important step, the EU should think of Ukraine's defence capabilities as part of its own.

Therefore, Ukraine is involved in the preparation of a strategy for the EU defence industry. Von der Leyen also stressed the need for cooperation and joint planning of military and defence-industrial programmes to meet not only Ukraine's defence needs, but also to contribute to the overall defence and security of the EU. Therefore, it can be said that **Kyiv is becoming part of a single European system of the military-industrial industry**. At least Brussels already has this vision.

This is also confirmed by the first-ever European Defence and Industrial Strategy (EDIS) presented on 5 March, which includes close cooperation with Ukraine. In particular, it sets out a clear, long-term vision for achieving defence industrial readiness in the European Union. The first priority means of implementing the strategy is a legislative proposal to implement the European Defence Industrial Programme (EDIP) and measures to ensure timely availability and supply of defence products. The strategy identifies the challenges facing the European Defence Technology and Industrial Base (EDTIB) and provides directions for the next decade. The EDIS proposes a set of measures to support member states in achieving these goals, including engaging Ukraine in initiatives and cooperation with it, and joining forces with NATO and other international partners. The strategy also sets out indicators to measure the progress of member states in achieving industrial readiness, such as equipment procurement, intra-European defence trade and defence budget use. As part of this strategy, the EU also plans to open a defence innovation office in Kyiv.

In addition, European politicians are now pursuing a **tougher policy towards both Russia and its allies**. In particular, Ursula von der Leyen stressed in her speech in Strasbourg before the EU Parliament plenary session on 21-22 March that if Iran goes ahead with its plan to supply ballistic missiles to Russia to escalate the fighting in Ukraine, the European Union will impose additional sanctions on the country. **The Pope also received criticism from the EU**. Joseph Borrell criticised him for calling on Ukraine to "have the courage to raise the white flag". "Calling on Ukraine to surrender is more than a wish for peace. I believe that now is not the time to offer Ukraine to surrender. On the contrary, this is the moment when we need to increase aid to the country," Borrell said.¹

In addition to moves in military aid, the European Union is considering providing Ukraine with approximately €27 billion in profits from Russian assets. It is projected that deposits held in Europe could provide between €15 and €20 billion in after-tax returns by the end of 2027. However, this amount will depend on changes in global interest rates. Currently, it is expected that these deposits could generate between EUR 2 billion and EUR 3 billion of profit this year, depending on potential changes in interest rates.

As for the use of these funds, there is currently no unanimous agreement in the European Union, as there is no agreed position on their confiscation. The money may be used for the needs of the Ukrainian Armed Forces or for humanitarian purposes, but the specific direction of spending is currently unknown. While the general principle of using the profits may be agreed upon, the actual spending requires further discussion, taking into account the constitutional norms of each EU member state. This process is currently active, and the EU expects significant progress on this issue.

In addition, the meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives approved additional funding for the European Peace Fund and the creation of a specialised fund to provide military assistance to Ukraine in the amount of EUR 5 billion for the current year. These funds will be used to purchase ammunition, military equipment and training for Ukrainian soldiers.

In addition, President of the European Council Charles Michel stressed the need for European states to **take the Russian Federation as a military threat seriously and**

¹ Боррель іронічно прокоментував слова Папи Римського про "білий прапор". 15.03.2024.
<https://tsn.ua/svit/borrel-ironichno-prokomentuvav-slova-papi-rimskogo-pro-bilij-prapor-2535589.html>

emphasised the importance of being prepared for different scenarios. According to him, *Europe needs to strengthen its defence capabilities and switch to a war economy in response to the threat from Russia.* He emphasised that **Europe should take responsibility for its own security and not rely entirely on the support of other countries, in particular the United States.** He warned that if the EU does not provide adequate support for Ukraine, it could become the next target of the aggressor. Therefore, it is necessary to be prepared for defence and transition to a war economy. In his statement, Michel also added that if the EU really wants peace, it must prepare for the possibility of war. Undoubtedly, these statements reflect serious concerns about Europe's security in the context of geopolitical turbulence on the European continent.

In addition, a "coalition of armoured vehicles" was created to support the Ukrainian Defence Forces, which is an important step to strengthen the country's defence capabilities in the face of geopolitical tensions. Poland and Germany, as co-leaders of this initiative, stressed their readiness to actively cooperate and take concrete measures to support Ukraine. One of the key advantages of this initiative is its long-term nature, which envisages an increase in defence production through Polish-German cooperation. This approach will ensure sustainable support for the Ukrainian Defence Forces in the long term. In addition, the creation of a Rapid Reaction Force in Europe, with the participation of Poland and Germany, is another important step to ensure security and stability in the region. This will allow for a timely and effective response to potential threats and crises.

This is because Europe has fully embarked on the path of rearmament, and this will now be a top priority of its policy. There is also a clear understanding that without Ukraine, it will not be possible to build a new effective defence system, and without preserving its sovereignty and independence, it will not be possible to ensure the continent's security. Furthermore, Ukraine has clearly established itself as an integral part of Europe, and therefore its membership in the EU is only a matter of time. On the other hand, Kyiv also needs to clearly understand its advantages in practical experience in building the defence sector and start developing a strategy for international cooperation in this area. In particular, appropriate legal transformations, new control and transparency institutions are needed. If Ukraine is able to mobilise its defence industry capabilities now, it will not only strengthen its international position but also gain additional economic benefits. But it is also necessary to maintain a realistic approach, as European defence is still in its infancy and will be a long process, ***and this should not be the only source of hope for Kyiv.***

However, while the prospects in the defence sector are quite optimistic, the picture is quite different when it comes to the issue of Russian assets with large aid packages. For example, on the eve of the EU leaders' summit, Josep Borrell proposed to use 90% of the proceeds from Russian assets frozen in Europe to purchase weapons for Ukraine through the European Peace Fund. He also noted that the remaining 10% could be transferred to the EU budget to strengthen the capacity of the Ukrainian defence industry. The Belgian government supported this plan. Under this scenario, Ukraine would also receive a profit tax charged by the Belgian government. This year, this tax will amount to about €1.7 billion, of which €1.5 billion will be paid this year. This was the main issue at the EU summit in March. Although most countries announced their agreement with the plan, Hungary said it would block the decision.

Although most EU countries have chosen to provide unprecedented alliance and assistance to Ukraine because of the peculiarities of the European system, this is not enough. **The emergence of pro-Russian satellites in the EU, such as Hungary and Slovakia, is a real threat to ambitious European plans and their further development.** Therefore, Europe must mobilise its resources to counter their position at all levels, including the institutional one. Moreover, the development of such a strategy should be done quickly. However, it is a good sign that other leaders, both in the EU and in its member states, are committed to doing everything possible to maximise support for Ukraine.

Foreign and Defense Policy of Ukraine

- *THEME ANALYSIS: Will V. Zelensky manage to break the blockade of US aid to Ukraine?*



Source: Office of the President of Ukraine

On 28 March, President Volodymyr Zelensky had a telephone conversation with Speaker of the US House of Representatives Mike Johnson. An official statement from the press centre reads: "I had a phone conversation with Speaker of the House of Representatives Johnson. I thanked him personally, both parties, the American people and President Biden for their vital support of Ukraine since the beginning of the Russian invasion." The President also told the Speaker about the situation on the battlefield, in particular about the rapid intensification of Russian aerial terror. Last week alone, Ukrainian cities and communities were hit by 190 missiles, 140 Shaheds and 700 UAVs. Ukraine's largest hydroelectric power station was put out of commission. "In this situation, a swift passage of aid for Ukraine by Congress is critical. We are aware that there are different positions in the House of Representatives on how to do this, but the main thing is that the issue of assistance to Ukraine remains a factor of unity," the President said. Zelensky added that during the conversation, they also discussed the need to cut off the sources from which Russia finances its war as soon as possible.² In addition, Zelensky and Johnson discussed the use of frozen Russian assets for the benefit of Ukraine. "In this, we also count on the leadership of the Congress," the President of Ukraine added.

The reason for such actions lies in the pre-election political crisis in the United States. It is slowing down the supply of aid to Ukraine as never before, and the prospect of Trump's re-election only increases fears and negative expectations. Therefore, Zelensky's move should rather be seen as an attempt to change the situation in Ukraine's favour.

At the moment, after the failure of the vote on Joe Biden's \$106 billion bill to help Israel,

² Зеленський поговорив зі спікером Палати представників США. 28.03.2024.
<https://www.rbc.ua/rus/news/zelenskiy-pogovoriv-zi-spikerom-palati-predstavnikiv-1711643576.html>

Ukraine, and Taiwan, a new bill was drafted in February this year to help the three countries for \$96 billion, but without a package to protect the southern US border with Mexico, a point to which Republicans are paying particular attention. It includes more than \$60 billion for Ukraine. On 13 February, the Senate approved the document. However, House Speaker Mike Johnson deliberately refuses to put the bill to a vote, citing the same border clause. This is definitely delaying the provision of military support to Ukraine.

Instead, Johnson began discussing a compromise version of the bill with congressmen. It proposes to allocate much less money to Ukraine - only \$47.69 billion. Johnson also hinted that the House of Representatives was ready to unblock aid to Ukraine, but that it would be provided by the US not free of charge, but through a loan or credit programme.

Of course, it can be said that the US is not in the best political position in general, and its unconditional economic hegemony has long since expired, and therefore it is forced to look for more profitable economic options. But as the practice of other states shows, this is not the case. For example, the Israeli Air Force has received a new batch of fifth-generation F-35I Adir fighters. According to the information provided by them, their fleet has increased by three aircraft, which have tail numbers 958, 959 and 960. It is important to note that Israel receives F-35I Adir free of charge. In addition, a contract for the supply of 25 more aircraft worth three billion dollars was recently signed. The deal will be financed by US aid funds. The Israeli version of the fifth-generation fighter jet has avionics developed by Israeli companies and can carry Spice-100, Python-5 and Stunner missiles. The purchase of 25 aircraft will make Israel's F-35 fleet the third largest in the world. Only the United States and Japan have more fifth-generation fighters.³

Also in early March 2023, it became known that Romania was preparing to buy US F-35 fighters. All the procedures for signing a contract for the purchase of these aircraft are going to be carried out either this year or no later than next year. The Romanian Ministry of Defence plans to receive the first squadron of these fighters after 2030. In 2021, it was reported that Switzerland would purchase F-35 fighters, allocating \$5.5 billion for this purpose. However, Thailand was told that the United States had refused to sell F-35s to the country. The reason for this refusal was cited as problems with training and maintenance.

In other words, the essence of the reduction in US aid to Ukraine is not due to economic reasons. It is driven by domestic political and geopolitical motives. In particular, the fact that **Donald Trump, who is now actually setting trends in the Republican Party, has long been "engaged" to Putin, having agreed to sacrifice Ukraine for the sake of Russian alliance and joint counteraction to China.** Of course, one can rightly say that such a policy will only lead to the defeat of not only Ukraine, but the entire West. After all, Russia has shown that it will never be a reliable ally. But Trump, as a politician, has never been defined by foresight, but by stubbornness in his political ambitions.

The US democratic bloc, of course, is more favourably disposed towards Ukraine, which is confirmed by its actions. For example, the US Department of Defence has released a full list of weapons that will be included in a new \$300 million military aid package to Ukraine through direct deliveries from US army stockpiles. This package is the first shipment of weapons from the US in 2024 and is the 55th tranche of equipment to be provided to Ukraine by the Biden administration. The Ministry of Defence can support this emergency package after identifying contractual savings from previously allocated additional funding that can be used to replace the Ministry of Defence's stock. The weapons to be delivered to Ukraine include: missiles for Stinger MANPADS; additional ammunition for HIMARS; 155 mm artillery shells, including high-explosive and dual-use shells with improved cluster munitions, and more.

"Assistance to Ukraine remains a smart investment in our national security. It deterred

³ Ізраїль безкоштовно отримав від США нові винищувачі F-35. 23.07.2024.

<https://www.unian.ua/world/izrajil-bezkoshtovno-otrimav-vid-ssha-novi-vinishchuvachi-f-35-12338184.html>

potential aggression in other parts of the world while strengthening our defence industrial base and creating high quality jobs for the American people," the US Department of Defence said. ⁴ While this news is certainly good news for Ukraine. However, it also shows a dangerous trend. *The Ukrainian issue in American politics is becoming a matter of internal confrontation, similar to the issue of migration.* Where Democrats are for it, Republicans are against it. And this categorical confrontation is becoming a hallmark of American political life. Trump, who has a good chance of winning the election, will use the Ukrainian issue against Biden, and Biden against Trump, to strengthen his position. For Ukraine, this is a rather pessimistic scenario in which the level of seriousness on the part of the United States towards it has fallen sharply.

In these difficult circumstances, unfortunately, **Kyiv can also do little to change minds in Washington, and now it has to develop a more independent strategy. *It should focus on its European allies. Europe itself understands that it will now have to take the lead in helping Ukraine.*** Thus, Europe and Ukraine should consider the possibility of Donald Trump winning the US presidential election in 2024 and quickly concluding a deal with Russian President Vladimir Putin. This was stated by Czech President Petr Pavel on the air of the Polish media outlet TVN24. "It's not about undermining transatlantic ties or doubting the United States as an ally, but we have to realistically recognise that Trump sees many things differently," Pavel said.

He noted that Ukraine has limited capabilities on the battlefield, unlike Russia. Therefore, Ukraine's allies should recommend limiting offensive actions and strengthening defence. The Ukrainians have consistently demanded increased support for air defence systems, including drones, fighter jets and helicopters, from Western allies as the fighting with Russia escalates. These weapons could improve Ukraine's ability to support its ground forces and intercept Russian bombers before they can hit military or civilian targets. According to Pavlo, the only way to achieve this is to supply Kyiv not only with purely defensive weapons, but also with those that can disrupt the Russian army's supply lines, such as artillery or longer-range cruise missiles and F-16 aircraft. "Only a balance of power can make both sides realise that they will not achieve further success and that it is time for negotiations," Pavel said.

So, while the **American scenario seems very bleak for Ukraine, it still has European hope. If the EU and Kyiv can build a strategic cooperation, they may be able to survive this difficult time.**

⁴ У Пентагоні розповіли, яка зброя увійшла в новий пакет допомоги Україні.13.03.2024.
<https://armyinform.com.ua/2024/03/13/u-pentagoni-rozpovily-yaka-zbroya-uvijshla-u-novyj-paket-dopomogy-ukrayini/>



Source: Army FM

■ Changes at the front

Trend: *Putin is changing the concept of war - from seizing territory, he is moving to the complete destruction of Ukraine.*

Russian President Vladimir Putin has ordered his army to recapture Ukrainian cities after their destruction. To do so, the enemy has a "three-phase plan to capture Ukrainian cities after their previous destruction," according to a report by the Czech daily *Aktualne Zpravodajstvi*.⁵ The first phase is aimed at spreading panic among civilians to force them to flee. During the second phase, the KABs will destroy residential buildings and industrial infrastructure in Ukrainian cities. In the third phase, Russian Armed Forces units will attack the destroyed and abandoned cities. In March, the enemy used a record number of KABs - more than 2,300. Production of three-tonne FAB-3000 bombs was also resumed. Under certain conditions, the Russians could hypothetically use up to 5,000 CABMs per month. "Such a scenario threatens Ukraine with catastrophic consequences: millions of Ukrainians will be forced to flee to Europe, which will be on the verge of a migration crisis," the Czech publication says.

In this way, Russian President Vladimir Putin is preparing the ground for "the biggest humanitarian catastrophe" in Ukraine. An important goal of this enemy plan is to destroy Ukraine's energy infrastructure. The Russians are consistently attacking cities near the frontline or the border - Sumy, Kharkiv, Nikopol, Dnipro, Kryvyi Rih, Mykolaiv, Odesa -

⁵ Putin nařídil ruské armádě vyhladit ukrajinská města. 5.04.2024.

<https://aktualnezpravodajstvi.cz/2024/04/05/putin-naridil-ruske-armade-vyhladit-ukrajinska-mesta/>

because the air defence system is unable to intercept all missiles fired at close range. As a result, the energy infrastructure of frontline cities suffers the most damage. "It is no coincidence that after these attacks, Russian propagandists began to write in unison that Ukrainians should flee Kharkiv, the city that suffers the most from Russian anti-aircraft missiles," the newspaper said. With the resumption of FAB-3000 production, the enemy will be able to easily destroy densely populated areas, thermal power plants, logistics and factories. As the Russians advance, strikes by KABs will force Ukrainians to flee their settlements.

On the Siversky and Slobozhansky directions, Russians carried out air strikes in the areas of Neskuchne, Sumy region; Kruhle, Kharkiv region. About 20 settlements came under enemy artillery and mortar fire, including Bleshnya, Hremyach in the Chernihiv region; Kucherivka, Sosnivka, Marchykhina Buda in the Sumy region; Kudiyivka, Strilecha, Pletenivka in the Kharkiv region.

In the Kupyansk direction Russians did not conduct any offensive (assault) actions. The occupants are conducting systematic air strikes in the areas of Hryhorivka, Sinkivka, Petropavlivka in Kharkiv region and are shelling Dvorichne, Sinkivka, Petropavlivka, Pishchane in Kharkiv region with artillery and mortar fire.

In the Liman direction, Ukrainian army repelled enemy attacks near Terny, Donetsk region, and Bilohorivka, Luhansk region, where the enemy, supported by aviation, tried to break through the defences of our troops.

In the Bakhmut direction, the Defence Forces repelled attacks near Chasiv Yar, Ivanivske and Klishchivka in Donetsk region, where Russians, supported by air power, tried to improve the tactical situation.

In the Avdiivka direction, Ukrainian Armed Forces repelled systematic attacks in the vicinity of Berdychi, Umanske, Pervomaiske, Nevelske in Donetsk region, where the enemy tried to drive the Defence Forces units from their positions.

In the Novopavlivka direction, the Defence Forces continue to hold back the enemy in the areas of Krasnohorivka, Pobeda, Novomykhailivka and east of Vodiane in the Donetsk region, where the enemy, with the support of aviation, tried to break through the Ukrainian defence.

In the Orikhivskiy direction, the enemy, with the support of aviation, carried out systematic attacks on the positions of the Defence Forces in the areas of Staromayorske in Donetsk region and Robotyne in Zaporizhzhia region.

In the Kherson direction, Russians continue to attack the positions of the Defence Forces on the left bank of the Dnipro River. The following localities came under artillery and mortar fire: Zolota Balka, Baryslav, Mykhailivka in Kherson region and the city of Kherson; Solonchaky in Mykolaiv region.

■ ***Military assistance***

Germany has announced a new aid package worth €500 million. It will include 10,000 pieces of artillery ammunition from the Bundeswehr's stockpile, as well as 100 armoured personnel carriers and 100 transport vehicles. This package brings Berlin's total aid to €7 billion in 2024. This amount also includes the funds allocated for the Czech initiative to purchase shells. Thus, Germany will finance the purchase of 180,000 shells. It also became known that the government will order another 100,000 shells from the German industry.

Finland is participating in a Czech initiative to purchase hundreds of thousands of rounds of ammunition for Ukraine, allocating 30 million euros.

Romania has approved the transit of combat boats provided by Finland to Ukraine. It is also reported that about 50 Ukrainian soldiers will undergo training on Romanian territory.

Canada will allocate 40 million Canadian dollars and about 30 million US dollars to implement the Czech initiative. Canada will allocate 40 million Canadian dollars and about 30 million US dollars to implement the Czech initiative. The country will also provide the Ukrainian Armed Forces with night vision devices worth \$5.7 million.

Belgium plans to provide a large aid package for Ukraine worth an additional €412 million, consisting of three parts. The first part will include three Alkmaar-class mine countermeasures ships in cooperation with the Netherlands. Belgium will provide basic training at the naval academy and maintenance of the minesweepers to ensure their seaworthiness and efficiency, while the Netherlands will provide on-the-job training for the crews. The second part involves the purchase of armoured ambulances as part of a joint initiative of the Benelux countries. It is reported that they are to be modernised before being handed over. In addition, there are plans to jointly purchase reconnaissance drones and transfer about 300 Iveco LMV armoured vehicles. Their main functions are reconnaissance, patrolling, communications, escort and maintenance. The vehicles can also be equipped with various machine guns. The largest, third part of the package - worth €373.1 million - will be used to supply artillery ammunition from Belgian stocks and through international group purchases.

Denmark is planning to provide a package worth \$330 million, which will include Caesar self-propelled artillery systems, self-propelled 120mm mortars and shells. In particular, the Caesar howitzers will be provided in cooperation with France, and 155mm ammunition will be provided jointly with Estonia and the Czech Republic.

The USA. The White House has allocated a \$300 million package, the first since December 2023. It includes:

- anti-aircraft interceptor missiles;
- GMLRS missiles for HIMARS missile systems;
- 155-mm artillery shells (including high-explosive and cluster munitions);
- 105-mm artillery shells;
- 84 anti-tank systems.

According to US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, this package will last for several weeks. The aid was made possible by cost savings in contracts. For her part, Pentagon spokeswoman Sabrina Singh warned that the March package was unique and that there would be no opportunity to repeat it. And that further support for Ukraine will depend on when the US Congress votes for the multibillion-dollar aid. It is expected that \$60bn could be unlocked as early as the end of March or April.

■ *Russia: External and internal challenges*

Trend: *The Crocus terrorist attack and ideological preparations for Russia's new summer offensive against Ukraine.*

Russian propagandists continue to actively conduct the information operation "Perun", which we described in the previous issue of the weekly, with the aim of destabilising the political situation in Ukraine and Western countries. According to the Defence Intelligence of Ukraine, this operation is also being carried out on the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and in various regions of Russia, involving units of the "federal service of the National Guard" and spies from the "Russian Main Intelligence Directorate".

Kremlin propagandists issue instructions to Russian Guard spies to carry out activities such as discrediting Ukrainian and Western politicians, justifying Russia's aggression against Ukraine, spreading disinformation about the "normalisation of life" in the occupied territories

of Ukraine, creating the image of "Ukrainian Nazis" and many other things that threaten Ukraine's national interests.

According to the Russian methodology, the Kremlin's special services plan to tell about the events in Ukraine in the first half of 2024, using both well-known and new fake *narratives*. Propaganda activities peaked on the day of the "Russian presidential election". Operation Perun is expected to be completed by 30 June this year.

Ukrainian intelligence also notes that there is another Russian sabotage operation, Maidan-3, aimed at undermining the situation inside Ukraine. The Russians see its goal as organising mass protests in the country and entrenching general distrust of the authorities. According to Ukrainian intelligence official Andriy Yusov, such a situation would create great difficulties for the Ukrainian military at the front and threaten the support of the international coalition.

"Two years after Russia unleashed a full-scale war of aggression, Ukraine is facing an objective threat to its existence as a state, as a nation, as a community of free and equal people. In the context of deliberate distraction of the world's attention from the ongoing and bloody Russian-Ukrainian war, the leadership of the aggressor country has implemented a plan of planned sabotage, information operations and outright provocations.

The main directions and goals of the enemy are to disrupt Ukrainian mobilisation, spread disinformation about Ukraine's inability to win, create and spread fakes about "*fatigue from Ukraine*" among our partners and allies in the world. **The Russians' global goal is to reduce the support for our country from the international pro-Ukrainian coalition.** Inside Ukraine, the Russians' goal is to demoralise Ukrainians, sow panic among the population, drive a wedge between the military and civilians, and put everyone at odds with everyone, including representatives of the country's political leadership and civil society. Russian special services have extensive experience in conducting hybrid wars. They spend no less on information attacks against Ukraine than on conventional warfare," Andriy Yusov said on the air of the national news telethon.

In addition, Russian intelligence services are seeking to question the legitimacy of decisions made in Ukraine after 20 May, the date when Volodymyr Zelenskyy's term as president would have ended. The occupiers are trying to use the topic of the end of the presidential term to create the impression that the Ukrainian leader has lost his powers, although according to the Constitution of Ukraine, the presidential term cannot end without elections, and elections are impossible during the war. It is worth noting that the first stages of the operation failed. However, the special operation has now been postponed to other dates - April and May, as well as the aforementioned Perun. According to the enemy's plan, by the first half of June, the situation in our country will be undermined, and then Ukraine will suffer a military defeat in the east - this is the key idea behind this information and psychological operation.⁶

But now, the Kremlin's information campaign has also been complemented by the terrorist attack in Crocus City Hall. Thus, on 22 March, a mass shooting took place in the city of Krasnogorsk, Moscow Region, at the Crocus City Hall concert hall before a concert by the band Picnic. Russian media reported that persons in camouflage broke into the venue and opened fire with automatic weapons. The attackers threw a grenade or petrol bomb, which started a fire. The Russians reported 143 dead and 107 hospitalised. Officially, ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack.

However, Vladimir Putin created a different version for himself. He addressed Russians about the attack only in the evening. He declared 24 March a day of national mourning and said that a window had been prepared for the suspects to cross the border with Ukraine. Putin promised to identify all those who ordered the attack, who "will be fairly punished". He also compared the detainees to "Nazis who decided to organise a show trial", clearly referring to

⁶ Розвідка: У березні-травні спецоперація Росії "Майдан-3" досягне кульмінації.27.02.2024.
<https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2024/02/27/7443989/>

Ukrainians. "As for the investigation. I can say the following: all four perpetrators have been found and detained. They were trying to hide and were moving towards Ukraine, where a window for crossing the border had been prepared for them," he said. Putin is also going to "join forces with other countries in the fight against international terrorism".⁷

It is clear that such a statement about a "window to Ukraine" cannot be anything but absurd, as terrorists would still have to cross the Russian border. Such words can only mean that Russia does not control part of its border. But there is another trend in Russian politics at work here. Over the past two decades, the Russian government has demonstrated a flexible approach when it comes to defining Russia's main enemy. At different times, this role has been attributed to Caucasian separatists, Georgian revolutionaries, and the Islamic State. However, at some point in 2021, Kyiv became the undisputed leader in the competition for the dubious title of the collective *West's main "anti-Russian tool"*. And now, even a terrible terrorist attack with mass casualties is not enough to convince the Kremlin to change its attitude and admit that its efforts to conquer Ukraine have led to ignoring the threat from Islamist extremists and gaps in Russia's internal security. But the Kremlin continues to insist that the Crocus tragedy has a direct link to Ukraine, but is unable to provide any convincing evidence or specific details to support its claims.

The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement claiming that "investigative actions carried out by the Russian competent authorities indicate that the traces of the latest terrorist attacks lead to Ukraine". Moreover, Russian government officials and media outlets began to demand the arrest of SBU Head Vasyl Malyuk. In addition, the Russian side, in its propaganda spirit, is demanding that Kyiv "immediately cease all support for terrorist activities, extradite the perpetrators and compensate the victims". "Ukraine's violation of its obligations under the anti-terrorism conventions will entail its international legal responsibility," the Russians cynically declare.

Many theories and conspiracies can be constructed as to why what happened in Krasnodar happened. Starting with a hidden agreement between Putin and ISIS that would have given Russia a precedent for internal Russian upheavals such as a tougher migration policy or the start of greater internal control, and ending with personal infighting between different FSB units that deliberately missed the terrorist threat and allowed the tragedy to happen. But much more global and important is how **Russia is now using the terrorist attack in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war.**

Thus, although the Russian version of the Ukrainian trail does not stand up to any criticism and is not seemingly recognised by the Western media, it is still clearly fixed in the discourse. And accordingly, *Kremlin subordinated this act to the information and psychological preparation of the upcoming offensive, which is expected in the summer.* Traditionally, Russia wants to present itself in the eyes of the international community as a righteous victim, showing the inhumanity of its enemies, in this case, Ukraine. Moreover, the topic of the threat of terrorism is deeply embedded in the public consciousness of the international community. By doing so, Russia wants to undermine its allies' faith in Ukraine, and thus their assistance. Of course, if Europe is successful and short-sighted and succumbs to provocations, Moscow will have a platform for an offensive against European states.

Moreover, it has become clear from subsequent events that Putin used this terrorist attack to achieve more global goals. This version is supported by the support of the Russian special services, which monitored this terrorist scenario but did not intend to stop or prevent it. Obviously, their inaction was due to two intentions of Putin. *Firstly*, Putin presented himself in the international media as a "victim" of this terrorist attack, and immediately a lot of condolences from the leaders of most foreign countries poured in on behalf of the "Russian people". And they immediately forgot the illegitimacy of the presidential elections in the

⁷ Путін виступив зі зверненням щодо теракту під Москвою та заявив про "українське вікно". 23.03.2024. https://gazeta.ua/articles/life/_putin-vistupiv-zi-zvernenniam-schodo-teraktu-pid-moskvoyu-ta-zayaviv-pro-ukrayinske-vikno/1175748.

occupied territories, his status as a criminal and other serious war crimes. French President E. Macron even offered to help Putin in the fight against terrorism. This image of a "victim" gave Putin the opportunity to largely legitimise his status as a leader and to offset the international isolation he found himself in after unleashing the Russian-Ukrainian war.

Secondly, Putin used this terrorist attack not only to justify the upcoming summer offensive against Ukraine, but also to support D. Trump in the presidential election race and to strengthen his personal hatred of Ukraine. The Main Investigative Department of the Russian Investigative Committee accused Ukraine of the terrorist attack on the Crocus City Hall near Moscow, claiming that the funds were received through commercial organisations, including the oil and gas company Burisma Holdings. "It has been established that the funds received through commercial organisations, in particular the oil and gas company Burisma Holdings, which operates in Ukraine, have been used in recent years to commit terrorist acts in the Russian Federation and abroad to eliminate prominent political and public figures and cause economic damage," the statement said. It is worth noting that the son of the US President, Hunter Biden, has been a member of the Supervisory Board of Burisma, owned by Ukrainian oligarch Mykola Zlochevsky,⁸ since 2014. Therefore, the campaign headquarters of US presidential candidate Donald Trump may well take advantage of such a fake "tip" from Putin about the alleged indirect involvement of the current head of the White House, Joe Biden, in "terrorist financing" through a Ukrainian company.

So now, Ukrainian society, our international partners and allies should show a balanced and persistent joint resistance and take comprehensive security measures, especially in the information space, to effectively counter global threats and challenges of the new global hybrid warfare, which the Russian Federation has mastered. It is clear that it will use all means and strike at all vulnerabilities.

⁸ Кремль звинуватив у теракті під Москвою нафтову компанію, де працював син Байдена. 9.04.2024. <https://glavcom.ua/world/world-politics/kreml-zvinuvativ-u-terakti-pid-moskvoju-naftovu-kompaniju-de-pratsjuvav-sin-bajdena-995212.html>