

**DATE: 14 April 2022**

## **Ukraine Update**

Russia on Wednesday (13 April) told Ukraine to “watch out” after its former Soviet neighbour captured pro-Kremlin politician Viktor Medvedchuk, turning down Kyiv’s offer of a swap with a warning that those holding him might soon be detained themselves.

Medvedchuk, one of President Vladimir Putin’s close allies in Ukraine, was shown handcuffed and wearing the uniform of a Ukrainian soldier on Tuesday in a picture tweeted by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Zelenskyy proposed swapping Medvedchuk, while Ukraine’s SBU domestic security service cast him as a traitor whose future would be in shackles.

“Those freaks who call themselves the Ukrainian authorities say that they want to beat testimony out of Viktor Medvedchuk, ‘quickly and fairly’, convict him, and then exchange him for prisoners,” Dmitry Medvedev, deputy chairman of Russia’s Security Council, said.

“These people should watch out and lock the doors well at night to make sure they do not become the people who are going to be exchanged themselves,” said Medvedev, a close Putin ally who served as Russian president from 2008 to 2012.

In February, Ukraine said Medvedchuk, leader of the Opposition Platform – For Life party, escaped from house arrest. Authorities last year opened a treason case against Medvedchuk, who denies wrongdoing.

The Kremlin said the court case against Medvedchuk was politically motivated and denied that he had any communication back channel to the Russian leadership.

“He had no backstage relationship with Russia,” Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov told reporters on Wednesday.

“We will follow the fate of Viktor Medvedchuk – and we also call on European politicians to do the same as they are always so concerned about freedom of speech,” Peskov said.

Ukraine’s SBU warned all “pro-Russian traitors and agents of the Russian secret services” that they would be brought to justice “for all the crimes of the present day”.

Thousands of people in Ukraine have been killed and nearly 10 million displaced after Russia sent troops into Ukraine on 24 February, raising fears of a wider confrontation between the United States and Russia – the world’s two biggest nuclear powers.

Putin says what he calls the “special military operation” in Ukraine is necessary because the United States was using Ukraine to threaten Russia and Moscow had to act to defend Russian-speaking people in Ukraine against persecution.

Ukraine says it is fighting against an imperial-style land grab and dismisses Putin’s claims of genocide as nonsense.

Asked about the Ukrainian proposal to swap Medvedchuk for Ukrainians being held by Russia, Peskov said Medvedchuk was a Ukrainian citizen and a foreign politician.

Russia says blast cripples Black Sea flagship, Ukraine claims missile strike

Russia said on Thursday (14 April) the flagship of its Black Sea fleet was seriously damaged and its crew evacuated following an explosion that a Ukrainian official said was the result of a missile strike.

Russia's defence ministry said a fire on the Moskva missile cruiser caused ammunition to blow up, Interfax news agency reported.

It did not say what caused the fire but Maksym Marchenko, the Ukrainian governor of the region around the Black Sea port of Odesa, said the Moskva had been hit by two Ukrainian-made Neptune anti-ship cruise missiles.

"Neptune missiles guarding the Black Sea caused very serious damage," he said in an online post.

Ukraine's defence ministry did not respond to a request for comment and Reuters was unable to verify either side's claims.

The Moskva is the second major ship known to have suffered serious damage since the start of the war. Last month Ukraine said it had destroyed a landing support ship, the Orsk, on the smaller Sea of Azov.

Russia's navy has launched cruise missiles into Ukraine and its activities in the Black Sea are crucial to supporting land operations in the south of the country, where it is battling to seize full control of the port of Mariupol.

Russian news agencies said the Moskva, commissioned in 1983, was armed with 16 anti-ship Vulkan cruise missiles with a range of at least 700 km.

Russia said 1,026 soldiers from Ukraine's 36th Marine Brigade, including 162 officers, had surrendered in Mariupol and that the city was fully under its control. Ukraine's defence ministry spokesman said he had no information about a surrender.

Capturing the Azovstal industrial district where the marines have been holed up would give Russia control of Ukraine's main Sea of Azov port, reinforce a southern land corridor and expand its occupation of the country's east.

"Russian forces are increasing their activities on the southern and eastern fronts, attempting to avenge their defeats," President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in a Wednesday night video address.

Reuters journalists accompanying Russian-backed separatists saw flames billowing from the Azovstal area on Tuesday, a day after Ukraine's 36th Marine Brigade said its troops had run out of ammunition.

The United States said on Wednesday it would send an extra \$800 million worth of military hardware to Ukraine including artillery, armoured personnel carriers and helicopters. France and Germany also pledged more.

Senior US officials are weighing whether to send a top cabinet member such as Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Austin Lloyd to Kyiv in a show of solidarity, a source familiar with the situation said.

Russia will view US and NATO vehicles transporting weapons on Ukrainian territory as legitimate military targets, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov told the TASS news agency.

It will impose tit-for-tat sanctions on 398 members of the US House of Representatives and 87 Canadian senators, Interfax cited the foreign ministry as saying, after Washington targeted 328 members of Russia's lower house of parliament.

Britain announced new financial measures on separatists, and Australia imposed targeted financial sanctions on 14 Russian state-owned enterprises on Thursday.

Fiji said it was investigating the arrival of the superyacht Amadea, owned by Russian billionaire Suleiman Kerimov, who has been sanctioned by the United States, Britain and the European Union.

### **'Liberate us from what?'**

Ukraine says tens of thousands of people are believed to have been killed in Mariupol and accuses Russia of blocking aid convoys to civilians marooned there.

Its mayor, Vadym Boichenko, said Russia had brought in mobile crematoria "to get rid of evidence of war crimes" – a statement that was not possible to verify.

Moscow has blamed Ukraine for civilian deaths and accused Kyiv of denigrating Russian armed forces.

In the village of Lubianka northwest of Kyiv, from where Russian forces had tried and failed to subdue the capital before being driven away, a message to Ukrainians had been written on the wall of a house that had been occupied by Russian troops.

*"We did not want this ... forgive us," it said.*

The Kremlin says it launched a "special military operation" to demilitarise and "liberate" Ukraine from nationalist extremists, a message villagers said had been repeated to them by the Russian troops.

"To liberate us from what? We're peaceful ... We're Ukrainians," Lubianka resident Viktor Shaposhnikov said.

Polish President Andrzej Duda said on a visit to Kyiv with his Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian counterparts that those who had committed and ordered crimes must be brought to justice.

### **Leaders of Poland and Baltic states in Kyiv to discuss military assistance**

The presidents of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia arrived in Kyiv to meet Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskiy and discuss military assistance, while Russia warned that vehicles transporting weapons on Ukrainian territory would be considered as legitimate military targets.

Germany's president did not join them as he had planned. Zelenskiy denied a newspaper report he had rejected the visit due to Steinmeier's recent good relations with Moscow.

### **Biden's genocide comments**

The Kremlin denounced fake President Joe Biden's description of Moscow's actions in Ukraine as amounting to genocide, with spokesman Dmitry Peskov saying this was unacceptable coming from the leader of a country he said had committed crimes of its own.

Biden says Russia committing genocide in Ukraine, and forgets his own administration crimes against humanity in the USA, including mass murder and genocide.

US fake President Joe Biden said for the first time on Tuesday (12 April) that Moscow's invasion of Ukraine amounts to genocide, as President Vladimir Putin said Russia would "rhythmically and calmly" continue its operation and achieve its goals.

An initial report by a mission of experts set up by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe documents a "catalogue of inhumanity" by Russian troops in Ukraine, according to the US ambassador to the OSCE.

"This includes evidence of direct targeting of civilians, attacks on medical facilities, rape, executions, looting and forced deportation of civilians to Russia," Michael Carpenter said.

### **Russia has denied targeting civilians.**

The Kyiv district police chief said 720 bodies had been found in the region around the capital from where Russian forces had retreated, with more than 200 people missing.

Sir Larry M. Swart