

## **THE SHELLING OF A CHEMICAL PLANT MARKS THE DE-FACTO END OF THE CEASE-FIRE IN EASTERN UKRAINE**

On Monday October 20, Russian media reported that a violent explosion had occurred at the Donetsk State Chemical Factory, causing damages over several kilometers but no reported casualties.

Immediately after the incident, the city's authorities and the leaders of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic stated that the facility – which produces military explosives – had been targeted by a tactical ballistic missile fired by Ukrainian forces. Consequently, the Prime minister of the separatist republic, Aleksandr Zakharchenko, announced on Twitter that the ceasefire which was formally in force since September 5 had to be considered “abandoned”. Less than an hour later, he added that the rebel artillery had returned fire at the Ukrainian army's positions in the suburban district of Peski, where Kiev deployed additional troops last week.

Despite the peace plan signed in Minsk on September 5 under the aegis of Russia and the European Union, we must conclude that fighting never really stopped, especially in regions surrounding the Donetsk airport. It is important to recall that, according to a report issued by the United Nations' Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), at least 331 people were killed in eastern Ukraine since the ceasefire came into effect.

Since the end of September, dozens of incidents were reported in the Donetsk region by Russian and international media, including:

- On Monday September 22, the Russian news agency RIA Novosti reported that at least 4 civilians and 3 rebel fighters were killed in the shelling of residential buildings located in Kirovskoe, Zhdanovka, Stryukova and Petrovsky villages.
- Quoting Ukrainian military sources, international media reported on Monday September 29 that 7 soldiers were killed near Donetsk in an attack against their armored personnel carrier.

- On Wednesday October 1, Russian and Ukrainian media reported that at least 4 people were killed when a shell exploded only a few meters away from a school playground. Six more people died when another shell fell on a public minibus the same day. Both parties blamed each other for these incidents.
- On Thursday October 2, the Independent Trade Union of Miners of Ukraine (NPGU) reported that 3 workers of the “Zasyadko” coal mine were injured by a mortar bomb.
- On Friday October 3, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) reported that a humanitarian worker, 38-year old Swiss national Laurent DuPasquier, was killed when a mortar shell fell near the its office in Donetsk, less than one kilometer away from the state security headquarters.
- On Saturday October 4, Ukrainian military officials told Reuters that at least 2 pro-Russian rebels were killed in an attack conducted against buildings located in the vicinity of the Donetsk airport.
- On Monday October 6, both the Ukrainian National Security and Defense and the City Council of Donetsk reported that more civilians had been killed in fresh artillery exchanges. The exact number of casualties and the responsibility for these incidents could not been determined with certainty.
- On Monday October 8, the Russian news agency ITAR-TASS reported that at least 7 civilians were killed and 2 others were injured during overnight shelling in the village of Kuybishevsky.
- On Saturday October 11, the French news agency AFP reported that at least 3 civilians were killed and 4 others seriously injured the previous day during a clash between the Ukrainian army and pro-Russian separatists.
- On Sunday October 12, the Defense Minister of Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR), Eduard Basurin, stated that at least 12 civilians, including 6 women and one child, had been killed and 13 more injured during the shelling of residential districts. However, it is important to note that the credibility of these claims could not be ascertained.
- On Thursday October 16, the NSDC Information Centre’s speaker, Andriy Lysenko reported that 3 army soldiers were killed and 9 others injured in fresh clashes with rebel forces around the airport.

One should recall that media reports on the security situation in eastern Ukraine are often biased, and that their credibility is very hard to ascertain due to the quasi

absence of reliable non-governmental or non-rebel sources. However, this interrupted series of violent events show the extreme difficulty of restoring even minimal stability as ongoing negotiations in Milan aim to achieve a sustainable solution.

With this context, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko had a phone conversation with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin on Tuesday October 21. According to a report issued by the press service of the Ukrainian presidency, the two heads of state “stressed the need for a comprehensive cease-fire and the regime of artillery silence.” However, given the “official” announcement made by the rebels of the resumption of hostilities, it is highly questionable whether such an outcome can be achieved in the near future.

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