Russian-backed separatists continued to engage Ukrainian forces with indirect fire along the front line in Donbas, as talks resumed on the implementation of the February “Minsk II” ceasefire agreement. Separatist indirect fire killed two Ukrainian troops less than 10 kilometers outside Mariupol, one week after a separatist artillery barrage killed three civilians in a suburb of the strategic port city. These developments, taken in conjunction with the August 10 separatist combined arms assault east of the Donetsk-Mariupol highway and the uptick in heavy separatist shelling of Ukrainian-held areas outside the port city, indicate that the separatists have assumed a more offensive posture in the area since ceasefire negotiations paused on August 4. Russia and the separatists have previously expanded offensive operations in order to bring Kyiv to the negotiating table on more favorable terms, a strategy that has so far resulted in two unimplemented ceasefire agreements. Russia and the separatists have demonstrated that they have no intention to implement a lasting ceasefire and are using the ceasefire to disguise their offensive territorial objectives and to extract political concessions from Kyiv. Near-term separatist escalation or de-escalation in the Mariupol area will reflect the progress of ceasefire negotiations in Minsk and presidential-level talks between Ukraine and Germany, France and Russia, the three other countries behind the original negotiation of “Minsk II,” and the degree to which they serve separatists’ interests.