

# Ukrainian Military Units Side With Pro-Russian Forces, Crimean Authorities Say

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The head of the Ukrainian navy has sworn allegiance to the Crimea region, with the majority of Ukrainian military units on the peninsula expressing support for pro-Russian forces, local authorities have said.

Rear Admiral Denys Berezovsky, who was only appointed head of the navy on Saturday, swore allegiance to the Crimea's pro-Russian leaders on Sunday, in the presence of new Prime Minister Sergei Aksenov.

Following his defection, Ukraine has opened a criminal case of treason against Berezovsky and has placed Admiral Serhiy Hayduk in charge of the navy, said Viktoriya Syumar, deputy secretary of Ukrainian Security Council, Reuters reported Sunday.

Meanwhile, Crimean authorities said Sunday that most of Ukraine's military units on the peninsula had sided with pro-Russian forces "without a single shot fired," and warned the

commanders of a few units that remain loyal to Kiev that they would face criminal action if refused to surrender.

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"I would like to warn commanders who force their subordinates to commit illegal actions that they will be punished according to existing laws," Crimea's Prime Minister Sergei Aksenov said in a statement.

The Crimean government said earlier that some 10 warships from the Ukrainian navy left their naval base in Sevastopol apparently on orders from Kiev.

Crimea is now at the center of the ongoing crisis in the country as pro-Russia groups move to distance themselves from a reformed national parliament that ousted President Viktor Yanukovich a week ago.

The current developments come shortly after Russia's upper house of parliament unanimously approved a request from President Vladimir Putin on Saturday to deploy military forces in Ukraine's mainly ethnic Russian-populated region of Crimea.

Putin issued his request in response to what he said was a threat to the lives of Russian citizens and military forces located in naval bases around the Crimean peninsula.

Putin, who is the Supreme Commander of the Russian Armed Forces, has not yet ordered the deployment of a "limited military contingent" in Ukraine, but said in telephone conversations with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and U.S. President Barack Obama early on Sunday that Moscow reserved the right to protect its own interests and those of Russian speakers in the event of violence breaking out in eastern Ukraine and Crimea.

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