

Ukraine President Moves to Disband Crimean Supreme Council

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Ukraine's interim president has moved to disband the Crimean local legislature after it approved a referendum to ask the region's voters whether they wanted the peninsula to become part of Russia.

In a strongly worded television address on Thursday night, calling referendum plans a "farce," a "falsity" and a "crime," Oleksandr Turchynov said the country's parliament will begin proceedings to disband the Crimean legislature, or Supreme Council, and block the planned balloting.

"The Crimean Supreme Council, which is fully controlled by the Russian military, has made an illegal decision to hold a referendum," interim president Turchynov said, Ukrainska Pravda reported.

"By the power invested in me I have blocked the Crimean parliament's decision," he said. "We

will protect the inviolability of our territory. We will protect the sovereignty of our country," he said.

Echoing the regional lawmakers, the city council of Sevastopol — a port on the Crimean peninsula where Russia's Black Sea naval fleet is based — also voted Thursday to have their city join Russia, and to hold a referendum on the topic, financing it out of municipal funds.

The prime minister in Ukraine's interim administration, Arseniy Yatsenyuk, has called the Crimea referendum plans an "illegitimate decision."

"Crimea was, is and will be an integral part of Ukraine," he said.

Ukraine's Security Service, or SBU, has opened a criminal investigation against Crimean lawmakers on the charges of threatening the territorial integrity of Ukraine, the security agency's spokesman said. The charge carries a sentence of up to 12 years in prison.

The Ukraine's Central Electoral Committee has also decided to cut off Crimea's access to voter databases to prevent the "illegal local referendum," a spokesperson said, Ukraine's UNIAN reported.

Western officials have said that a local referendum on secession would contradict the Ukrainian Constitution.

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